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ADRIENNE HOPE.

THE STORY OF A LIFE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

MATILDA M. HAYS,

Author of "Helen Stanley," &c.

"World's use is cold—world's love is vain,
World's cruelty is bitter bane;
But pain is not the fruit of pain."

A VISION OF FORTUNE.

VOL. I.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
80, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE,
1866.

[THE RIGHT OF TRANSLATION IS RESERVED.]

250. l. 239.



BOOK FIRST.

" My child, where'er thy life may go,
To know that thou art brave and true,
Will pierce the highest heavens through;
And even there my soul shall be
More joyful for this thought of thee."

* * * *

" One guiding memory I shall take,—
Of what She prayed that I might be,
And what I will be for her sake !"

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

ADRIENNE HOPE.

“So Charles Luttrell has done it at last—sold himself, body and soul! In a devil of a hurry, too! I don’t believe he has known the lady many weeks.”

“Charles Luttrell married—to whom? Why I saw him only three days ago; dined with him here, and he never hinted a word. Impossible!—some one is fooling you, old fellow.”

“I am the fool of my own eyes then, Harvey, for I saw a bride and bridegroom drive from St. George’s just now as I was strolling down here, and there was no mistaking Luttrell’s big brown head and broad shoulders. He caught sight of me, too, and waived his hand to me. He always was a close fellow. He will make a first-rate Cabinet minister,

and is sure to be one before many years are over his head, even should he not step into the ancestral title."

"And pray what fair lady has carried off the prize so many mothers and daughters have sought in vain to win?"

"The prize is on Luttrell's side if broad acres and lots of gold can compensate a man for his loss of liberty; that depends upon opinion. I should look twice before I made such a leap, but Luttrell seems to have gone at it headlong."

"But you do not tell me who it is, Graham, and by Jove, I believe you are joking. Luttrell is too prudent a fellow to rush into matrimony blindfold. Besides, he has always declared that when he did marry it should be to strengthen his family connection. He is deuced proud of his old blood, and money and blood don't often run together on the female side."

"Oh, the blood is good enough here, of the best in Scotland, and the wealth is unquestionable. The lady is the Scotch heiress, Miss Macdonald. She has been her own master and mistress for the last two or three

years, and, if report be true, even during the old Laird her father's life time, the grey mare, &c., &c. I doubt if Charles Luttrell find himself other than a tenant at will on any estate of her holding."

"Depend upon it, Luttrell knows what he is about, Graham. So Miss Macdonald is the bride. Well, a fellow might do worse who goes in for respectability and political connection. Why her great-uncle is the Duke of——. Yes, Luttrell strengthens his position by this marriage, and if the lady be somewhat strong-minded, why Luttrell is strong-minded and strong-willed too, and will hold his own on the domestic hearth as he does everywhere else. He is not a man to be trifled with, as those who come across his path find. I don't know a more uncompromising fellow than Luttrell. He has been a thorn in the side of the ministry ever since he and his party have been in opposition."

"Well, *chacun à son goût*, Harvey. I hate politics, and marriage, and strong-minded women, and I don't see why a fellow should bother himself with either or any of them, at least until he touches upon the milestone which

warns him that two of his allotted fourscore and ten years are left behind. And from a strong-minded woman, Heaven, in its mercy, preserve me at all times and seasons !”

“Amen, Georgie Graham, for the woman’s sake as well as your own. And now come and have a biscuit and a glass of wine, for I must be off to that infernal committee. To think of Luttrell getting spliced in such a hurry, and not a word to his old chums. Before the Session is over, too ! There is something at the bottom of it I don’t understand. But, as you say, he always was a close fellow, from his college days upwards.”

And so saying the two young men who had met in the hall of a St. James’s-street Club, disappeared through the folding doors at the end, in quest of those creature comforts for which clubs, whatever their original design may have been, seem now chiefly to exist.

Lord Harvey, as may be gathered from what has just taken place, had been at college with Lord Charles Luttrell, but though in the warmth of his own feelings he called himself Luttrell’s “chum,” it is doubtful if the term would have been reciprocated by the man

whose sudden and unannounced marriage took the circles in which he lived as much by surprise as it did Lord Harvey and Georgie Graham, as he was familiarly called. Both young men his companions and associates who might naturally have expected to be informed upon a matter of such importance to their friend.

But Lord Charles Luttrell was a "close fellow," and so others beside his chums, disposed of the question.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGIE GRAHAM was right. Lord Charles Luttrell and Charlotte Macdonald, the Scotch heiress, were man and wife, and the world of fashion, or that segment of it, to which they belonged, made a nine days' wonder of the secrecy and despatch of the marriage, and then, sagely concluding, that, after all, the affair was none of theirs, it passed from their thoughts and conversation, and was as though it had never been

As the next heir but one to a marquisate, and that one a frail life which might at any moment fail, Lord Charles had of course excited the hopes and fears of matrons with maidens to dispose of, and of maidens themselves with hearts or hands to bestow.

But he was not a lady's man. His ambition was for other than social success, and it soon became apparent that if ever he did marry it would be for the advancement of his ambition, and that the wiles of mothers and daughters, who had no solid advantages to offer, were altogether thrown away.

His marriage with the Scotch heiress was just such a marriage as his acquaintances would have predicted for him, and if there were something unusual in its privacy and haste, why it was only in keeping with the general reserve of his character, and if Miss Macdonald were content to forego the usual preliminaries of—"a marriage in high life is, we hear, on the *tapis*," &c, &c.—why it was no affair of any body else, and perhaps a *mariage de raison*, as this was undoubtedly conceived to be, was best contracted in private.

So wagged the world's tongue, and meanwhile Lord and Lady Charles Luttrell went through the honeymoon routine with apparent satisfaction to themselves, and with the quiet self-possession of old married folk rather than the elation and enjoyment of

bride and bridegroom. But then Lord Charles was on the shady side of thirty, and the lady not far behind him in years, and in this age of fast living when men are *blasé*, used up at twenty, and women old at twenty-five, vivid emotions and smiles and tears, the rainbow moods of youth, are not to be looked for after those periods, and would scarcely be decorous if seen.

Lord Charles was a tall, fine looking man; broad shouldered and deep chested, the make of man which usually indicates vigour of mind and body, the head large and well placed upon the shoulders, the brow broad, the beard thick and silken : a pleasant man to look upon at first sight, though the long thin legs and habitual stoop of the broad shoulders detracted from his physical beauty, and joined to a certain sinister expression of countenance, gave to a careful observer room for doubt and hesitation as to the correct interpretation of what may be called our natural language.

Lady Luttrell was a fair haired, grey eyed woman, with marked features and evident force and decision of character ; but a broad

brow and a smile of exceeding sweetness, joined to the clear frank expression of the large grey eyes, redeemed the face from plainness, and told of a kindly if shrewd nature—of a will to be guided rather than coerced, of a loyal heart and mind—a woman of whom a husband might make a friend, and find his surest happiness by so doing, a woman whom if a husband chanced to make his enemy he might find implacable, to the last degree.

They had been three weeks married and were still in the neighbourhood of Paris though their bridal tour was to be a protracted one and to extend, *viâ* Switzerland and the Tyrol, to Italy. But Lord Charles had pleaded business communications as a reason for delay in or near Paris until Parliament should break up, and all chance of his duties recalling him should be over.

“What a pity that we married until the session was over,” said Lady Charles one morning, as she saw by her husband’s manner, that the contents of a letter he was reading disturbed him.

“A pity; perhaps, that we married at all,

Charlotte," he answered drily, folding the letter and carefully thrusting it into the breast pocket of his coat. "I told you frankly that mine was a busy and an occupied life, that I had aims and ambitions which would always be first to me, and that I could ask no woman to be my wife who would not be content to hold a place second to these. You accepted me on these conditions and you must stand by the consequences ;" adding, in a gentler tone, "my ambition and success will henceforth be yours also, and you are not the woman I believe, if you cannot sacrifice something of personal pleasure and ease to the advancement of your husband's welfare."

The grey eyes clouded for a second, and the firm mouth shut firmer ; then frankly extending her hand to her husband, Lady Charles as frankly said :

"Forgive me, if I seemed impatient ; but it was your annoyance and discomfort I was thinking of, not my own. I am very happy here, and quite content to wait until you are ready to go."

Lord Charles pressed the hand he took in token of reconciliation ; but, bride and bride-

groom as they were, and this their first misunderstanding, no further caress passed between them.

Three months later,—three months of pleasant summer travel, and they were in Rome. It was Lady Luttrell's first introduction to the Eternal City, but her husband knew every ruin, and palace, and picture. He had passed days and months there in early youth, when, fresh in classical lore, it was ancient Rome of which he knew most as he first set foot within its gates; and many were the pleasant hours they passed now, one day tracing the events of the Empire, giving time and place to the scenes of past days—rebuilding the palaces of the Cæsars, peopling the Flavian amphitheatre and the Circus Maximus, with their thousands of spectators, listening to the orations of Cicero in the Forum, or carrying their imaginations further back to the days when the Romans and Sabines, a handful of barbarians, occupied respectively the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, and the Forum, extending at that time from the Tarpeian rock to the Palatine, was the place of encounter between them.

Days when the two populations numbered only a few hundreds, and the rude aggressions of the Romans, dealing broken heads to men and broken hearts to women, ravished from fathers, husbands, and lovers, were but the forerunners of deeds of war and conquest, of an Imperial rule, unparalleled in the annals of the world before or since, and which has made of Rome a Queen City, never to be dethroned while civilization holds its place among the nations of the earth.

From the descendants of that handful of barbarians perched on the summit of the Palatine Hill, as from an inexhaustible fountain, the world has drained deep draughts of power and knowledge—political, social, religious, and artistic. The foundation and centre of civilization, great even in her decay, with more vitality in her sick body than in other nations sound of wind and limb, is there a future for Rome worthy of her past, or is she indeed, as her enemies would have us believe, in the mortal agony of a protracted death-throe ?

The old and the new life of Rome are alike fascinating, and Lord and Lady Charles

Luttrell entered keenly into the enjoyment of both.

A thoroughly cultivated man, time, and study of men and books had lent a grace to his early college learning, and to the influence his acute intelligence, and sound sense, had at once established over his wife, was now added the charm of polished and congenial companionship among scenes in themselves apt to intoxicate and bewilder. Lady Charles's whole nature seemed to expand, and as she hung on her husband's arm in gallery and church, or strolled by his side through the lovely gardens of the Borghese and the Pamphilia Doria, an expression of sunny happiness beamed from the large grey eyes and played in the sweet smile, and if as the world said she had not loved before marriage, something very like love was growing up in her heart now. A good woman, who has never loved, may without much risk embark upon the sea of matrimony, with only regard and esteem to guide her; if the man be worthy of that regard and esteem, they will deepen into what, if it be not love, as the young and enthusiastic know or dream of

it, is at all events so excellent a substitute, that the intrinsic value of the two is a fair subject of dispute. But let no woman venture upon the experiment who has a sealed chamber in her heart—an uneffaced memory—a haunting presence, and regret, however hopeless it may be, for in proportion as she is true and worthy, she will ruin her own peace and self-respect, and destroy the comfort and happiness of the man she marries.

But Lady Charles was free of heart and fancy. The only child of a wealthy Scotch laird, with some of the noblest blood of Scotland in her veins, she had grown up the companion and friend of her widowed father.

Thrown into the society of men from her earliest days, meeting them under the protection of her father's presence, her frank and genial manner, while it charmed and delighted elder men, gave to the younger a sense of ease and security in her presence, which made them at once too much her friends for any attempt at idle flirtation and love-making.

Charlotte Macdonald, the trusted and

beloved of her father, the pride of his heart and home, had, from a frank ingenuous girl, ripened into womanhood among influences so kindly and genial, that while that father lived, she had no hopes, no wishes, that were not bound up in him, no thought or desire for any life apart from his; and when, upon one or two occasions, some among the many men attracted to their happy and cultivated home would gladly have been allowed to win so faultless a daughter for a wife, she had known how to discourage such hopes without losing their friendship either for herself or her father.

The one great sorrow of her life had been caused by that father's death some two years previous to the marriage which had taken the world of their belongings by surprise, but which was not in reality so sudden and unlooked for as it appeared.

Charles Luttrell had upon more than one occasion been a guest in her father's house. One of those many young men who had shared his Highland hospitality in the shooting and deer stalking season, and whose companionship he particularly enjoyed, speak-

ing of him to his daughter as one of the most promising and rising young men of the party to which they both belonged.

During her father's life-time London had been rarely visited by the Laird and his daughter. While still in health, he had busied himself with the care and improvement of his estates, deeming it the first duty of a landlord to spend his revenue for the benefit of those from whom it is derived, and the long illness which preceded his death had of course rendered absence from home impossible.

Thus it was that when, some twelve months afterwards, Miss Macdonald made for herself a home in London, her reputation as the Scotch heiress, which had grown up with her in her own country, assumed a new gloss, and gave rise to many speculations as to the fortunate man who should win her. Good birth and a large fortune are an open sesame, and Miss Macdonald could choose her own friends and acquaintances. That she meant to do this soon became evident, and though she punctiliously returned the numerous calls made upon her, and in every way most

scrupulously discharged the duties and courtesies of her position, it was soon felt that the Scotch heiress had tastes and a will of her own, and that those who would gain access to her must respect both. Lord Harvey was but expressing the popular opinion when he spoke of her as somewhat strong-minded.

A woman who has opinions of her own, and self-respect enough to live by them, is sure to come under this category,—but of all social calumnies this is perhaps the easiest to bear since it carries its own cure.

Lord Charles had been among the first to pay his respects to the lady in her new home. He had entertained a great regard for her father, and the remembrance of the pleasant days passed in his society and that of his charming daughter made it at once a duty and a pleasure to renew the acquaintance.

That the meeting was mutually pleasant any third person would have seen. Miss Macdonald welcomed in him a favorite of her beloved father, and Lord Charles was sufficiently charmed with the lady, and conscious of the advantages of her position, to be flattered by the very cordial reception

accorded him. For a short time their intercourse appeared likely to strengthen and deepen—then, silently and without apparent cause, the visits of Luttrell ceased altogether, and when by chance they met at the houses of friends the barest civilities passed between them.

Miss Macdonald was conscious of coolness and estrangement, but her sympathies had not been sufficiently enlisted, to make Luttrell's whim other than a matter of speculation, and he would probably have passed from her life for ever, or have remained but an outside acquaintance, but for the accident of a joint visit to a country house—that most dangerous of all concatenation of circumstances both for a flirtation and the more serious feeling which has matrimony for its end and object. The daily familiar intercourse, the long morning excursions—the quiet hours passed in the library and music-room—the social dinners—the still more social evening, with its genial chat—its song and laugh—its whist—its chess, and Cupid alone knows what else of charming and seductive invention for intoxicating hearts and senses!

Many a flirtation begins or ends there to be rued for ever after—many a maiden is there bewitched into an engagement which parents and friends oppose, and which, after more or less of anxiety, and sorrow, and struggle, is snapped, leaving a lasting sting behind it, which neither time nor future success can altogether extract. Many a man there drifts into the port he has long carefully kept on the far distant horizon, many a heart is shipwrecked, while some few date thence a long and prosperous voyage, and bless for ever the charms and delights of a visit to a country house.

It was in the ease and privacy of a country house, with all its fascinations and dangers, that Charlotte Macdonald and Charles Luttrell met. But theirs were not natures to be carried by storm—rather to be sapped and conquered by the gentle intercourse of daily and familiar life—more especially with the starting point of sympathy between them which existed in the deep love of one, and the esteem of the other, for the departed Laird, the memory of whose upright and be-

neficent life was at once blessing and consecration to the heart of his daughter.

Whatever it was which had caused Luttrell's withdrawal from Miss Macdonald's society in London, there was no trace now of coolness or estrangement. She was already an installed guest when he arrived, and they resumed their acquaintance with the ease and polished familiarity of the intercourse of their father's house in days gone by, when Luttrell had been a welcome and favoured guest.

Congeniality of mind and temperament seemed the bond between them. Miss Macdonald, accustomed from infancy to share her father's plans and schemes, and to enter with interest into the details of his business life, seemed to slip naturally and easily into the same position with Luttrell, who to his political career and ambition joined the no less laudable one of a true philanthropist. President of one or two philanthropic societies, and a member of the committees of several others, he found in Miss Macdonald at once an apt listener, and a generous supporter of

the different charities he advocated ; while she, eager to employ worthily the surplus wealth entrusted to her care, pleaded for guidance and direction, and initiation into the one life open to women of wealth and position, whose enlarged and enlightened sympathies ask further scope than family and private life can afford.

The days passed pleasantly on, and though the grave sedateness of Miss Macdonald and Lord Charles saved them from any approach to inuendo or jest, it soon became apparent that of all the party there assembled, these two were the best assorted, and that neither in ride, drive, nor at table, could it come amiss that they should find themselves thrown together ; while their elders, not unfrequently attracted by the subjects in discussion between them, would make them the centre of animated and at times even brilliant conversation. For the host was a leading man of the Conservative party, then in opposition, and there were not wanting among the guests distinguished men—politicians and writers—to whom Luttrell was known as a young man of considerable promise, and who, of all men,

are most keenly alive to the charm of cultivated intelligence in a woman.

The days passed pleasantly on, when at last Luttrell, breaking through the habitual reserve which often annoyed his most intimate friends, giving the impression of something withheld if not concealed, spoke freely to Miss Macdonald of his hopes and ambitions, of the difficulties of his position as a younger son, the plans he must reserve until political success should enable him to carry them into effect ; he found not only a ready listener, but a sympathiser eager to aid and assist to the utmost. It was but a step further to ask her to share those hopes and ambitions as his wife—to enter with him the field of philanthropic labours, and this result seemed to flow so naturally from the position they occupied to one another, that it would perhaps have been much greater matter for surprise had they parted simply friends instead of betrothed lovers.

Betrothed lovers—what other phrase is there which will better convey the exact relationship of a man and woman whom friendship, similarity of temperament, and

identity of tastes and habits, have under favourable circumstances brought into juxtaposition, as promised man and wife.

As Luttrell somewhat harshly reminded his wife during the early days of their marriage, while asking her to share his future, he had frankly admitted that ambition was his master passion, and that the woman who consented to become his wife must resign herself from the first to all the consequences this might entail. Was there nothing else to which the wife of Charles Luttrell would have in bitterness of soul to resign herself, as time went on and the real character of the cold, calculating man developed itself? Did no mis-giving warn the free, happy heiress to pause ere she pronounced the fatal promise which would divide her from that sunny peaceful past, where she had been loved and cherished and honoured, where her own will and wish had ever reigned paramount, where none had thwarted, vexed, or grieved her?

A fate seems at times to over-hang and drive us on, to lift us above the current of our

ordinary lives, only that we may be dropped where the whirlpool may suck and engulf us, and the waters of bitterness close over our heads.

The two parted then—betrothed—Luttrell returning to his duties in the House, Charlotte Macdonald to Edinburgh, that she might inform her father's lawyer of the step she was about to take, and give him instructions for the settlements. For these matter-of-fact lovers had discussed and arranged all that was necessary. Luttrell insisting that the whole of her property should be settled upon herself and her children, while his moderate fortune, inherited from his mother, would of course be secured to his heir.

On this point he was peremptory, refusing for himself even the ordinary life-interest in his wife's property, and no persuasion of Miss Macdonald or representations of his own professional adviser could shake him.

One other condition Lord Charles had attached to their marriage, or preferred rather as a personal favour, a concession to his peculiar wishes and feelings, and that

was, that it should be kept as quiet as possible while pending, and be solemnised at the earliest possible moment.

"I am not," he said to the lady, "on very good terms with my father, and the critical condition of my brother's health makes it desirable that our marriage should take place privately. My father would, I know, oppose the settlements I desire, and upon which alone I will marry. In all other respects, even he cannot find any objection to the connection, and the surest way of avoiding all controversy and unpleasantness, so much to be deprecated between a father and his son is to leave no time for discussion and dispute. Hurry forward on your side the settlements with your lawyer, and I will undertake that there shall be no delay upon mine. My brother's health and the known coolness between my father and myself, to say nothing of your own recent loss, will sufficiently explain why the marriage should be private, if indeed explanation be necessary, where the principals have only to please themselves."

The pride of the Macdonalds might have taken alarm one would think at anything

which could look like a surreptitious entry even into the noblest family England could boast ; but the reasons Luttrell advanced were so good in themselves and so plausibly stated both to the lady, and, at the last moment, to his own father, who had not now to learn for the first time of what unbending material his second son was made, that neither could offer valid objections. The match, even with the settlement Lord Charles insisted upon, was unexceptionable. So he carried the day, and, as we have seen, the wedding was sufficiently sudden and private, to take all but the very inner circle of intimates and friends by surprise. These too, were to be numbered among the bride's connection, not the bridegroom's, whose father was the only one admitted to his confidence, and who knew too well the iron will and implacable temper of the son he had to deal with, unnecessarily to thwart or oppose him. Moreover, the marriage was one after his own heart, and neither to the lady herself, nor to her wealth and connection, was there any room to take exception, even had he been so disposed.

The Marquis kept his son's secret, and Lord Charles Luttrell's marriage was a *fait accompli* by the time it reached the ears of his brother and sister.

CHAPTER III.

THE first month of marriage; usually supposed to be all sugar and sweetness, is, we suspect, not unfrequently one of considerable perplexity and difficulty. When the man marries for a pretty face and a plaything, and has not miscalculated the quality of his toy, doubtless the early days of possession are as charming and delightful to the grown child as to the inmate of the nursery, into whose hands have fallen a long-wished-for doll or rocking horse. But to men and women of a sterner mould—to whom life, with its cares and duties, is a reality—whose characters have grown and ripened under widely different influences, whose wills are developed, whose habits and tastes fixed,

however sincere the love which may have brought them together, however well founded their esteem for and appreciation of each other, the first mingling together of their daily lives, the early initiation into the thousand and one unevennesses of temper and spirits, the unintentional jarring of prejudices, the rubbing down of angles, which while they lived alone, or with those accustomed to them from childhood, were hardly perceptible, unknown perhaps even to themselves; all these make of the early days of even well-assorted marriages any thing but the bed of roses usually supposed. We can truly know no one with whom we have not lived in the familiarity of daily life, who has not shared with us the same home, had an equal right with ourselves to all and everything about us, for something of company manners will hang round even the most intimate and cherished of visitors, veiling just those small peculiarities of temper and temperament which make or mar the happiness of domestic life.

The early weeks of Lord and Lady Charles Luttrell's marriage had been singularly pro-

life of trials and perplexities to both. The protracted stay in Paris, whither they had proceeded immediately after the wedding, caused ostensibly by Luttrell's anxiety to be within reach should some important and unlooked-for division render his presence in the House necessary, but connected it was evident with some private source of care and anxiety—the increased reserve and the almost moroseness of his manner when once or twice his wife had ventured near the subject of his evident uneasiness—the throwing back of her frank and sympathetic nature upon itself—a state of things so different to that to which she had been accustomed in her long and close companionship with her father, and which Luttrell had hitherto encouraged—could not fail, spite of her sweet and placid temper, to awaken feelings of mingled pain and disappointment, verging upon distrust and resentment.

The scene at the breakfast-table in connection with a letter was, however, the only overt act between them, and Lady Luttrell's mastery of her own hurt feeling and frank admission to her husband that it was for him she

was grieved and uneasy, seemed to touch his better nature, and from that moment matters mended between them.

Once out of Paris, his temper and spirits both appeared to revive, and certain it is that the fourth month of their marriage, which found them in Rome, found them also on an easier and more comfortable footing with each other, and to all outward appearance a happy and well-assorted couple.

Intending to remain in Rome until the meeting of Parliament should necessitate their return to England, they had taken a suite of rooms in a large house at the southern end of the Via Gregoriana, rooms on the fourth piano, beneath the windows of which Rome lay extended like a panorama, the turbid Tiber separating the Janiculum from its sister hills, and gliding like a monster sea-snake through the valley from its entrance into the city close to the Porta del Popolo to its exit south below the Aventino. There lies the Queen City of the World, with its quaint, irregular, grey roofs, its three hundred and sixty-four churches, its noble pagan temples and imperial palaces,

noble in their ruin and decay, basking through the day in the undimmed lustre of an Italian sun, to be glorified by its setting rays of gold, and crimson, and purple, the depth and richness of whose hues none who have not seen can by any means imagine, and none who have seen can ever forget. How the rich warm light lingers over the city, and bathes the distant heights of Monte Mario, clinging with fondest and warmest caress to its friends of many centuries,—the Colosseum and the glorious aqueducts, whose travertine blocks seem to hold and reflect the rosy tints long after the sun himself has sunk beneath the horizon.

No fairer picture of a city can meet the eye day by day, while for richness and interest of association Rome may safely challenge the whole world.

And yet, what is modern Rome? In her daily life the great emporium of modern art; the fashionable resort of idlers and connoisseurs and dilettantis—of brainless millionaires and penniless wits—of all that vast floating population of Europe which peoples and upholds the baths and gambling tables of Ger-

many, supports the mammoth hotels of London and Paris, delighting the hearts and filling the pockets of hotel and lodging-house keepers from London to St. Petersburg, from Copenhagen to Palermo. A vast mass, the froth on the surface of the deep waters of progression—impelled by the onward undercurrent which, while it is uprooting nations, sweeping before it prejudice, and ignorance, and tyranny, floats to the surface these idlers of the hour who are yet unconsciously aiding in that assimilation of races—that free intercourse between peoples of different countries, which more than anything else will give the finishing touch to civilization and help to strengthen and perpetuate the world's peace.

Of the native life of modern Rome who shall venture to speak? The Pope at the Vatican, the cardinals, monseigneurs, and abbés, in their palaces, the priests in their churches, the monks in their monasteries, the nuns in their convents—do these represent the life blood of modern Rome? or must we look elsewhere for it, lower and deeper, among the people of the Trastevere — among the people in whose veins still flows the rich

impassioned blood of ancient Romans, unmingled and unpolluted, from whose swarthy faces and deep dark eyes glower the repressed force and passion and courage which dare not as yet blaze into action—a smouldering volcano, whose upheaving, long deferred, will sweep before it the wrongs and insults and tyrannies of ages—sweep spiritual bondage and temporal serfdom from out the fair Papal States now languishing and writhing in their already loosening gyves, eager to join hands with their regenerated brethren of Tuscany and Naples—burning for an united Italy, with Imperial Rome for its capital.

It was the artist life of modern Rome into which Lord and Lady Luttrell entered with the greatest enjoyment, devoting morning after morning to visiting studios. Herself skilled in modelling, Lady Charles took especial interest in the work of female artists. While in Florence she had made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Fauveau, the first lady sculptor who both in France and Italy openly adopted the profession. Of good birth, loyalists, and devoted to the Bourbons, the revolution of 1830 drove the Fauveau family

from Paris, and after a period of considerable danger and imprisonment, Mademoiselle de Fauveau found herself obliged to break up her studio in that city—to leave the scene of her social and artistic successes, and with her widowed mother and brother took refuge in Florence, where she has since resided in comparative seclusion, devoting herself to her family and her art with that loyal fidelity which would seem to be an inherent quality of the Fauveau blood. A pious Catholic, profoundly studied in history, and in both classic and modern languages, with a strong taste for archæology and heraldry, the bent of her genius is essentially mediæval. No gods or goddesses are to be found in her studio. To Christian not Pagan art she has devoted herself, and saints, angels, and cherubs take the place of nymphs, Cupids and Mercurys, types of an effete faith beyond which modern art seems for the most part unable to go.

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Has Christianity no heroes—no martyrs—no spotless virgins—worthy to replace these defunct deities? Is there no inner sentiment

and meaning in the Christian life and faith, in its high and noble attributes, which may find expression in sculpture?

To look to the work of modern studios we should say—no. The greatest masters of all schools—the Italian, the French, the English—cling tenaciously to Pagan gods and goddesses, as though with them love, purity, courage, passion, and power had fled from the earth. Our own John Gibson, whom Italian artists even more than English pronounce to be the great master of the day, has devoted a long life of conscientious study and work to the production of Cupids and Venuses and Mercurys—to the repetition of Pagan ideas which after all have no meaning, no life, in these our days.

This calm, earnest, simple, and single-minded man, whose days have flowed in uninterrupted peace and study—even when the elements of the social life around him have been tossed in wildest uproar—the art-hermit of the age, who, with French cannons and Roman bullets whizzing through the air and striking the very roof of his studio—was to be found in its inner sanctum, quietly

working at one of his beloved cities—perchance that very Venus, the apple of his eye, which, with its flaxen hair and delicate flesh tint took the vast Exhibition public of 1862 by storm. This master, whose works are types of all that is exquisite and graceful in form and sentiment, might he not have founded a new era of plastic art—have given rise to a school of modern sculpture, which should replace the effete gods and heroes of the Pagans?

Among all the different races of living sculptors Americans alone have shown a tendency to produce something new and original, and though none have been eminently successful—choosing for the most part the wild Indian life of the North American Continent for their subjects—yet this departure from the stereotyped classic form is welcome and refreshing, and though the skill may be less perfect, the imagination less poetic, there is a breadth and a vigour of handling among these latest recruits to the artist ranks which augurs well for the future.

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It was a lovely morning towards the end of October when Lord and Lady Charles paid their first visit to Gibson's studio. Bearing a special introduction, they had despatched it the day before that they might make sure of admittance to the master himself.

Their ring at the shabby, worm-eaten door — a whip-cord, with a knot at the end being the primitive arrangement by which the bell was set in motion—was speedily answered, while the immediate recognition of their name showed that they were expected.

The transition from the dirty unfragrant street to the cool large studio, filled with lovely statues and bassi rilievi, with a green vista of moss and fern and trickling water beyond, and a scent of the rich flowers of the south wafted on the breeze, was a pleasant surprise both to eyes and nose. The mellow sunlight poured down upon the verdant niche in the small garden—which the constantly falling water of a fountain keeps cool and fresh even through the burning heats of summer,—and streamed in at the open door, throwing a beautiful light upon the graceful limbs of "Hylas and the Water Nymphs," "Psyche

and the Zephyrs," two of the fairest groups the cultivated meditative brain has created, and the cunning hand of the master has wrought.

Rough as the shed is, with its rafters and earthen floor, and accumulation of dust, it tells of the simple habits, the unpretending mind, of the artist, who has merged all thought and ambition in the noble children of his brain with which it is thronged.

Long would the visitors have lingered here, enjoying with appreciative eye the beauties before them, but the man who had received them, with the native courtesy of an Italian—by bows and gestures, rather than by words, indicating that the Padrone waited them—ushered them across the tiny garden into another studio, where they found Gibson himself, showing that since world-famous Venus, in all her early glory of paint and jewellery—when, truth to say, the colour was not altogether successful—and the ear-rings and necklaces of gold admitted of question.

But the master was delighted with his experiment, and after a few short words of welcome proceeded to discourse of the lost art

of colouring statues, of the great use the ancients had made of it, and of the desirability of restoring it. Never is Gibson so eloquent, so altogether charming, as when his art is his subject, and as he stood now, in his simple close-buttoned long grey coat and black velvet cap, the vivid eyes lighting up the quiet face, the firm, close-shut mouth jerking out the words one by one—with an occasional short, dry laugh of satisfaction at some joke of his own or of the little dark lady who stood by his side, evidently on terms intimate enough to say what she thought of his beloved statue and his enthusiasm concerning it, it was a scene to enjoy at the time, and to remember with pleasure after. Round and round the pedestal on which the Venus was mounted, the master and his guests slowly moved, viewing the statue from all points and at all distances, for the delight of the artist with this, the first result of a long cherished plan, was naive and artless to the last degree, and he met the bantering of fellow artists and friends with a spirit of complacent self-satisfaction, which entirely robbed all criticism of its sting, and rendered its subject invulnerable.

"Yes, yes, the colour has run a little there, between the toes ; true, true, that must be altered, but now see the effect of the hair, and the blue snood. Yes, yes, stand just here ; depend upon it the ancients knew what they were about, yes, yes."

The words coming out as though shot from a pop-gun.

Lady Charles, to whom statue colouring was altogether a new idea, as to whom was it not in those days, showed unintentionally by her manner that the effect was not at first sight, or altogether, pleasant.

Rapt as the artist might appear to be in his beloved Venus, his quiet eye never failed to detect what was passing in the minds of his guests as they stood with him before it.

"Well, my lady," said he, suddenly, addressing her, "and what do you think of my Venus?"

Thus addressed, she could but answer—

"I am not quite sure that I like it ; it is such an innovation, so startling, the eye must become accustomed to it. The statue is lovely, but of the colouring I am not quite so sure. I do not think I like it."

The artist laughed, a short sharp laugh.

"I knew it, saw it on your face ; we artists do not study the human face for nothing ! But it is quite a mistake, quite a mistake ; yes, yes. See what warmth, what life it gives to the marble ; why it is flesh and blood, not marble—a woman, not a statue. Depend upon it, the ancients were right, it only remains for us to find out, to discover their lost art of colouring ; yes, yes." From this fiat, "depend upon it the ancients were right," those who knew the artist knew also there was no appeal. Once assured that the ancients were in the habit of colouring their statues, he had resolved to follow their example.

"Yes, yes ; but I could not do it at once—as a young and comparatively unknown artist, the attempt would have been fatal. I should have hurt myself, and ruined the cause—yes, yes ; but I have never lost sight of the idea, never, and now I don't mind what any one says about it ; if they don't like my coloured Venus, why, I'll keep it myself."

Thus chatted the master, naïvely delighted with his experiment, and impressing every

one present with the singleness and simplicity of his nature.

"And now I have something else to shew you," he said presently, addressing himself more particularly to Lord and Lady Charles Luttrell—"a real woman—a young American lady—a pupil of mine, who knows as much of some parts of our art as her master can teach her—yes, yes; she models flesh, especially the bust and arms, as well as any artist among us—yes, yes."

And so saying he proceeded towards the corner of the room, where a curtain hung before the frame of a door, and drawing it aside disclosed a steep flight of stairs to a room above.

"Signorina, is there any admittance? Lord and Lady Charles Luttrell would like to see your work."

"Please come up," responded a clear cheery voice, and the master led the way, the little dark lady and her friends calling out, "addio, we cannot stay any longer,"—and thus unceremoniously taking their leave.

"Miss Hosmer—Lord and Lady Charles Luttrell," said the master, in his short, quick

manner, then walking straight up to the young artist's work, he said—"Umph, you have got on since I saw it—very good, yes, yes,"—and then falling back, he left the signorina to do the honours of the room and stood looking on.

Lady Charles, full of what she had seen so recently in Mademoiselle de Fauveau's studio, and delighted to find another woman entering on a career which the French lady had so successfully followed, cordially greeted the young artist, whose half-shy, half-defiant manner amused the self-possessed woman of the world.

But there was something very winning in the fair, broad brow, with its clustering, sunny brown curls, the inevitable velvet cap crowning them; the deep, earnest grey eyes, the compact nose, firm-set mouth, and square chin and jaw; the trim little figure, with its clothing of grey skirt and holland blouse, and as she addressed her visitors, the quaint short phrases, the peculiar sharp-cut of the words reminding them of her master (snap and bite, the wags called master and pupil, in commemoration of this pecu-

liarity common to both,) and the eyes and face danced and glowed with fun and fire, Lady Charles thought her as charming a sprite as the Puck she had modelled—and for which, before her visitors left, she received an order, accompanied by such kind expressions of admiration and good-will that the value of the order to the young artist must have been considerably enhanced.

From that day a friendship grew up between the two, and many were the pleasant rides over the Campagna in the gorgeous autumnal afternoons, many the pleasant evenings they spent together, in that freedom of intercourse peculiar to artist society—than which there is in nothing more charming and exhilarating in the way of social re-union.

Those are wise judges who, among the wealthy and educated, open their doors to artists of all professions. The aristocracy of the intellect is God's royal patent, and the humblest member enrolled beneath its banner has more valid claim for consideration and respect than the scions of noble houses, who owe all that they are to family influence alone. Noble birth and noble intellect, when found

together, crown man's nobility—but noble intellect confers a dignity and a majesty with which the very noblest birth alone can in no degree compete.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME twenty-five years before the opening of this story, in a quiet parsonage house not many miles from Exeter, there was born to the worthy rector and his wife a child comparatively of their old age—for many years lay between the advent of this little one and the brothers and sisters who had preceded her.

A fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed little darling it was, and at two years of age, a vivacious chatter-box and mimic, whose inarticulate utterances, rather guessed at than comprehended, were the delight of her mother and sisters.

A wee, toddling little tyrant, the pet and plaything of the household, and as the years passed on, she throve apace, growing with the

flowers and the trees of the parsonage garden—ripening in winter storm and summer sunshine, brightening the somewhat sombre household with her fun and merriment and light-heartedness—and if at times given to outbreaks and acts of rebellion, which necessitated the rare interference of the father, she was nevertheless the darling of the house and its neighbourhood—the very apple of her mother's eye.

And as Adrienne Hope grew and thrived apace, one by one the sisters left the tranquil home to become in their turn wives and mothers, while the two stalwart brothers took their flight from the parent nest to seek their fortunes together in some far distant colony where men are not so crowded and jostled together in the struggle for a livelihood that only the strong and favoured may look for success.

Mr. Hope knew too well the difficulties, the deferred hope, the life-long privations of a career like his own, to urge its adoption on either of his boys, so he wisely gave them as good a commercial education as he could command, and offered no opposition to their

wishes, when finally they asked his consent to emigrate.

Mrs. Hope felt the bereavement bitterly. The burdens and cares of a family and a small income—how small few would have guessed from the admirable appearance of the rector's family, and the constant acts of kindly charity extended to those in need about them—had completely undermined a not very robust constitution, and from the date of her sons' departure she became an altered woman.

The boys were twins—the last born before that interval at the end of which Adrienne had made her unlooked-for appearance. They had just attained their twenty-first year, while she was entering on her thirteenth, a bright handsome girl, tall and stout, with more of the development of a woman than is usually met with at that age. A broad square head, regular features, a fair and rather florid complexion, with blue eyes, and a magnificent head of golden hair, gave to her a noble and commanding presence. Power was in every look and attitude—power and wilfulness—for the pet and plaything of the family had grown to love and exercise the influence she wielded,

and only that a large and loving heart threw its shield around her, Adrienne Hope would by this time have developed into a selfish and spoilt character. But her affections were ardent, and the pure unsophisticated life around her, with its active duties of the family and parish, had to a great extent counteracted the baneful influences of her position. She ruled father and mother, but she ruled them with a loving hand, and had of late taken much of the labour of ministering to the poor from off her father's shoulders. Her bright young face was a welcome sight in the homes of the cottagers—and perhaps the creature comforts which it was her especial delight to concoct and take to the bedside of the aged and sick, were as fruitful of good and right feeling as though she had preached by the hour of Christian duty and charity.

“Full ears and an empty stomach stir the bile,” old Dame Winfield had said to Adrienne, apropos of a visit she had received from an Exeter district visitor, who had come to stay in the neighbourhood, and who went from cottage to cottage distributing cheap tracts and cheaper words—“there's no staying the

belly with wind, or stirring the heart with hunger, and them folks as think paper and print is to ease aching bones and turn sinners to repentance had better stop at home a bit, and make a trial how they likes it theirselves."

Tenderly attached to her mother, Adrienne sought in every way to lessen the blow of her brothers' departure. The difference between their ages, which in infancy and childhood had deprived her of the companionship usual between brothers and sisters, had also interfered between them in later years—for by the time Adrienne was ten years old, her brothers had entered life as clerks in a merchant's office in London, and their visits home had been few and far between. Her three sisters had married curates, and were dispersed in far distant counties, so that Adrienne had grown to be the stay and solace of her parents, and very capable she was of fulfilling the office.

And if Adrienne thus ministered to father and mother, there was one in that quiet household who with no less devotion ministered to her—who, giving the whole love of her honest heart to the bright young girl whom she had

helped to bring into existence, for the baby was in too great a hurry to wait the doctor's arrival, would have fought and perished and starved, have gone through the direst trials and privations, rather than one hair of her darling's head should have been ruffled, or a sorrow should have come across her bright path.

In all her childish troubles and peccadilloes it was on Peggy's faithful bosom that Adrienne wept or cradled herself back to peace and good temper—in all her games and amusements, some, it must be confessed, not altogether within the bounds of prudence and decorum, it was Peggy who aided and abetted, or shielded and defended, as occasion required. And now as day by day Mrs. Hope drooped and faded, it was upon Peggy's stores of wisdom and learning that the young nurse drew for such physical alleviations as simple herbs and nourishing diet may afford, and it was to Peggy Adrienne still imparted her hopes and fears, as the autumn merged into winter—the mild damp winter of Devonshire—and her mother's cough deepened with the shortening days, while her strength visibly declined.

A patient religious woman, Mrs. Hope had met the cares and trials of her life with silent fortitude and resignation ; and though she and her husband, in their young married years, when money was scarce and children came fast, had tasted absolute privation, scarcity of food and warmth, for this they could endure and yet uphold the decent requirements of their position, while respectable clothing for themselves and their children was an absolute necessity which drained their moderate purse, she had carried a brave front both at home and abroad, and had cheered and sustained her husband at times when he was ready to sink beneath the burden of poverty, so oppressive to men and women of gentle culture, but beneath which men are even more apt to sink than women.

The Rev. Augustus Hope, a student by nature, a parish priest by vocation, was one of those gentle high-natured men, who acquire their best development under favourable circumstances, and who, easily nipped and chilled, shrink sensitively from the struggle and turmoil of life, preferring to glide through its low and sheltered valleys rather than to

face the heat and burden of the day on its steep hill-sides.

A gentleman by birth and education, he carried with him into domestic life the magic charm of habitual courtesy—a charm which does more to cement family ties, to consecrate and perpetuate home affections, than we are apt to suppose. Beloved and respected by wife and children, to whom it was more a pleasure than a care to smooth his path, the Devonshire rector had of late years tasted the sweets of home comfort and ease, and while never neglecting the duties of his position, had found time to prosecute his beloved studies, and to gain no small reputation for science and learning by the papers he contributed to the various societies of which he was a member.

A happy and a peaceful household it had been, and the breaks made in its circle by the marriages of the daughters, were not of a kind to cause more than a passing regret, quickly healed in the increased happiness of the departed member, whose loss to the family was to be presumed a gain to herself.

Now, as the black shadow of slow undermining sickness crept over the thinned household, it was upon Adrienne the burden fell most heavily. As she listened to her mother's deep and prolonged cough, and watched the fair kind face blanching and fading, a terrible fear seized upon her that she was not long for this world, that a few short months might find her place vacant, and she and her father be left the sole disconsolate and bereaved inmates of a home once filled with youth, and love, and happiness. It was a bitter moment when the dread of her mother's danger first forced itself upon her, all the more bitter that she dared not share her fear either with her father or Peggy, dared not put into words the horror which hung over her lest the very framing of the sentence, the very tones that uttered it, might change that fear into certainty.

The girl had seen consumption again and again in the cottage homes around, she could not shut her ears and eyes to the symptoms which daily gained strength, and yet, while constantly and lovingly trying to persuade her mother to send for medical advice, with

that strange shrinking from facing the truth which makes such miserable cowards of some among us, brave enough in other things, she could not but feel glad, that hope—the hope of uncertainty, if nothing more—was still left.

“Mother, dear mother,” she said at last one evening, when a long and racking fit of coughing had left Mrs. Hope quite prostrate, “we must defer it no longer, the cough alone will wear you out, and as neither you, nor I, nor Peggy, can devise any thing which seems in the slightest degree to help you, you must see Dr. Brown. I will speak to papa at once, and to-morrow morning he will be here.”

“No, my child,” was the answer, “I know, and you know, that he cannot do any good. Sit you down here, close to me, while I tell you what you already know, Adrienne, my darling, my good, brave child—nothing on this side the grave can help me. I may be with you a few months longer, but no one can prevent or put off the change. My mother died of consumption; I watched and nursed her as you are watching and nursing me—I knew as you know, though no one had

told me, that my mother's days were numbered, and that no mortal power could keep her with us. Hush, hush, my darling, I tell you only what you know, and I tell you because he, my dear, dear husband, does not dream of danger, and you must be brave for his sake and mine."

The dreaded moment had come: Adrienne's worst fears had found shape and words. For a moment she tried to answer her mother's firm, yet tender and controlling look, but the effort was beyond her strength, and the warm loving young heart stood still for a second in the attempt, then sent the blood bounding to her brain, and with a low smothered cry of anguish, she buried her face in her mother's lap, while deep heavy sobs shook her frame, more the sobs of a strong man bowed from his manhood by uncontrollable grief, than the sobs of a young girl; but it was thus Adrienne had always manifested her feelings on the hitherto rare occasions when she had known cause for tears; thus we suspect that the deepest and most passionate female natures are given to manifest sorrow and pain beyond their endurance. To lighter natures tears

come lightly, and are solace and refreshment ; to those of sterner intenser mould they are rare, and like the up-heavings of volcanic lava, scorch and scarify instead of soothing and consoling.

Mrs. Hope wisely sought no more to appeal to her child's courage and endurance ; she knew that she possessed both, and that, the first wild outburst over, she would do all, for her father's and mother's sake, that she could. So she laid her hands with all a mother's caressing tenderness on the golden head in her lap, patted and smoothed it with hushed words of endearment, for this child was her darling, the child of her old age—her Benjamin.

Long and silently she had wrestled with her own heart—pondered how best the fatal intelligence could be made known to her darling, till the loving mother's instinct told her that from no lips could it come so tenderly as from her own ; that in after years, in womanhood, and perhaps in motherhood of her own, she would only the more fully recognize the mother's tender love and care, which had made her choose this mode of

announcing the heavy and inevitable bereavement that awaited her.

“In motherhood of her own;” alas, could that tender mother have foreseen the future which awaited her darling, she would have wrestled in prayer with God that one grave might hold them both; or that she might be spared to watch over and protect her.

CHAPTER V.

It was the end of August, when Mrs. Hope had parted from her sons, and though from that hour she had faded and drooped, it was only as autumn deepened into winter that the cough and utter prostration of strength assumed so serious an aspect, as to alarm Adrienne and Peggy.

Mr. Hope still remained in blissful ignorance of any cause for alarm. Engrossed in his duties and the studies which were his peculiar delight, he saw indeed, that his wife was weak and ailing, and never failed to impress upon her the necessity of rest and care; but no suspicion of the fatal malady had entered his mind.

For some weeks after the scene between

mother and daughter related in the last chapter, Mrs. Hope steadily resisted all Adrienne's entreaties that the family doctor might be sent for; and as steadily entreated, nay, even commanded her, to breathe no word to her father of the true state of the case.

"I know, my child, better than Dr. Brown can tell me, what my malady is, and how utterly impossible it is, with the best advice in the world, to do more than palliate and relieve. This little bottle," pointing to a small vial of morphine on the table by her side, "does all that can be done; and it would but add bitterness to the inevitable pain of parting to know that I had added one item of unnecessary expense to the heavy burden of debt which your brothers' outfit has inevitably brought upon your father."

"Then let us, at least, dearest mother, tell him how seriously ill you are."

"What need, my dear child? He sees me weak and failing; but he believes the mind to have more to do with it than the body. He looks to the spring and summer to restore me; and thus hopeful, waits and works in patience. Why harass and disturb him?

Spring will restore me, dearest; but not as he thinks. My work in this world is over; God is calling me to continue it elsewhere. I am content to go. But for you, my darling, I could find it in my heart, to be thankful to go. As I lay here unable to work or read, and my thoughts turn round and round upon what life has been to me,—blessed as my lot has been, compared to that of many others,—upon what it is to all of us, a period of trial and sorrow, and defeat, for even our successes are but defeats, when compared with our aspirations and endeavours, I see more clearly than before, that this life is but the dawn, the threshold of existence; I feel God calling me through the gates of death—death to this suffering body, to higher and fuller life—where I shall know and serve Him better; where I shall meet those who have gone before me, and await those who are to follow. Oh, my Adrienne, my darling, I feel God very near to me at times. He is calling me away mercifully and gently; remember how mercifully and lovingly he dealt with your mother, and when trials and sorrows of your own come to cloud your faith and belief

in His mercy and love—for we are thus tempted at times—think how, through a long life of many cares and sorrows, He has led and is now leading me nearer to Himself, to a land ‘where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.’ ”

Thus it was that Mrs. Hope, calm and happy in spirit herself, sought to strengthen and fortify her daughter, not only for the near bereavement which awaited her, but for the dangers and difficulties of the life in this world which lay before her; and Adrienne responded to her mother’s endeavours by brave efforts at self-government, checking the passionate outbursts of grief which ever and anon welled up within her—watching and waiting, and doing all that unbounded love and devotion could suggest, to fill the last days of her mother with peace and contentment.

Towards her father, also, her heart swelled with new tenderness. That good, gentle father, on whose face the shadows deepened, as time went on, and brought no renewal of health to his suffering wife. His earnest simple nature, living by faith—faith, first in all that his creed taught him, and then

faith in those about him, closed his eyes to more than the surface of things, as faith, so called, is apt to do. So that when Mrs. Hope, patient and gentle as ever, met his anxious looks and inquiries with loving and uncomplaining answers, though something of doubt and apprehension stirred within him, he was for the most part comforted and relieved; and returned to his parish duties and his books, if sad at heart, still only indefinitely alarmed and uneasy.

Mrs. Hope had not lived all these years with her husband, his faithful friend and companion, his stay and support, without attaining to a full comprehension of his character and nature. She knew that, whereas uncertainty and hope deferred, long watching and waiting, weighed him down and crippled his faculties—every energy of his mind and body was brought into exercise to meet a blow once fallen—this it was which made her so tenderly and anxiously conceal the fatal nature of her malady.

As the end drew near she would tell him—meanwhile, all of care and anxiety she could spare him she would. And so the days and

weeks went on. The married daughters knew of their mother's illness, but shared their father's belief that it was a temporary break-down—and engrossed in domestic ties of their own, took little count of its prolonged and deepening nature.

Winter was at last gone, and the long looked for spring had arrived. The spring, which in Mr. Hope's belief, as in the belief of so many hoping against hope as they watch the gradual decay of those dearest to them upon earth, was to work wonders of healing. Spring, with all its bright sunshine and soft breezes—nowhere in England brighter and softer than in the county where they lived—had come in unusual splendour ; but, alas, with it came, too, those fearful night perspirations, followed by fits of prostration terrible to behold.

Then it was that Mr. Hope became thoroughly alarmed—the scales fell from his eyes. He saw now at a glance that the days of his wife were numbered, and as she tenderly broke to him her own knowledge of her state, and her reasons for maintaining silence herself, and insisting upon Adrienne's doing the same, he felt for the moment as

though he never could forgive them for their loving concealment, as though if he had but known earlier he might have summoned skill and science to her aid to save her, or, if not that, at least might have shared in their months of doubt and apprehension. But the first burst of anguish and dismay over, he saw now, as he had had occasion often before to see, that his wife had acted kindly and wisely, and with that deep insight into his heart and mind which only the love of a wife can give.

Heavy responsibilities had been brought upon him by his sons' emigration, and only by the steady work of the winter just past could he hope to meet his obligations. That she might secure him that freedom from anxiety which she knew to be an indispensable condition to his successful working, this brave woman and loving wife had kept from him the deadly nature of her illness, the one secret and reserve of her married life.

Spring passed into summer, and with the first sweep of the sickle over the broad fields of golden-ripe grain, the ripe soul of the faithful christian wife and mother was gathered into the everlasting harvest of the great Master.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT Devonshire parsonage house was as snug a place of retreat as the heart of a student could desire. A quaint, irregular, many-gabled building, it stood about a quarter of a mile from the grey old church, on a terraced knoll, surrounded by a large rambling garden and orchard, and a couple of small paddocks, where the rector's cows had from time immemorial grazed. A green homestead, in a well timbered and well watered district; small farmers and agricultural labourers forming the sparse and scattered population. There was just enough of land attached to it to supply the rector's family abundantly with milk and butter, vegetables and fruit, and to leave an overplus

for the solace of the sick old bodies of the parish, delicate children, and child-bearing women.

The rector's study was in a distant angle of the old-fashioned house, apart from the family rooms in daily use, in a quiet corner, where household sounds rarely penetrated. A long, low, cozy room, with a large open hearth in the centre, where a fire blazed in the winter and smouldered nearly all the rest of the year ; for wood was cheap in that part of the country, and the rector loved the companionship of his fire, and save in July and August, the short summer months of our damp, sunless climate, there were very few days in which its warmth was not acceptable in the early mornings and evenings—a room tolerably well furnished with books, chiefly in dilapidated old bindings, which the rector was wont to call his ragged regiment. Books on Natural History, and Science, and Philosophy ; and the invaluable Encyclopædia Britannica, the crowning glory of all modest collections ; but though the library of a clergyman, it was noticeable that few theological works were to be found on the shelves,

and those only of the good, safe old school of Paley and Blair.

Not that Mr. Hope had always been indifferent on this subject. On the contrary, while at college he had gone through a period of great doubt and difficulty and tribulation. A young man of considerable power of mind, earnest and honest, he had fallen into the fatal error of supposing that to study and to search for truth were one and the same thing. A fatal error for all whose walk in life is prefixed, and whose after education is intended only to qualify them for the duties to come.

Mr. Hope was predestined for the Church, and it was therefore a fatal error to find anything else in the studies prescribed and the books put before him, than the orthodox helps to his profession. Yet so it was, so it often has been, and will be again, and very generally the result has been in the past, with great lights, as with lesser ones, that this unhealthy and unsound condition of mind has, by the united efforts of friends and the patient, been fortunately overcome, and though the wound may have remained a tender spot ever after, why, with the mind and conscience,

as with the body, wounds and scars must be tenderly dealt with, and the prudent man in either case will carefully avoid all that may rouse and excite them.

In proportion as the wound is deep, the healing operation will be slow and painful—but the elasticity both of mind and body is surprising, and there is no placing a limit to it in either.

Mr. Hope's cure had been long and painful; but like a man who sets his will with the physician's in bodily disease and so helps forward recovery—he set his will with that of his friends and advisers, and having once taken the fatal plunge and subscribed to those formidable Thirty-nine Articles—the *bête noir* of modern divines—he was fortunate enough to obtain a hard-working curacy, and in his ministrings to the spiritual and temporal needs of the poor, his sympathy with their ignorance, and poverty, and suffering, his gentle and kindly nature found balm and consolation. He grew to love these labours of his office, this practical rendering of Christ's teaching—the kernel and essence of true Christianity—love and gentleness, sympathy

and pity. And if his sermons fell below the standard of his own intellectual power and cultivation, and so failed to attract or instruct men of his own station and mental calibre, they addressed themselves nevertheless to the needs of the poor, of the struggling and sorrowful—to the universal heart that beats alike beneath home-spun and broad-cloth; and many a man and many a woman, of the upper as well as the lower classes, carried away from the sermons of the hard-working curate comfort and refreshment, and renewed courage to continue that good fight, of which none but God and ourselves for the most part know, but for which, God be thanked, we can, if we will, find help everywhere about us.

In the intervals of professional duties, Mr. Hope found ample exercise for his mental powers in the pursuit of natural and scientific studies. Into these he threw the vigour of his mind and the love of inquiry which as a theological student had nearly brought him to grief. Men may search for truth with impunity in all directions but one—yet strangely enough that one more nearly and dearly con-

cerns both the temporal and eternal welfare of the human race than all the others put together. Verily, man is a paradox and theological man is a paradox of a paradox ! After some years thus passed between the loving discharge of parish duties and the cultivation of his own private tastes and talents—years, when, though engaged, both he and the lady who afterwards became his wife were too poor to even dream of marriage in the far distance,—Mr. Hope was lucky enough to attract the notice of a neighbouring squire with a small preferment in his gift, which, becoming vacant, he offered to Mr. Hope's acceptance—an offer as welcome and grateful as it was unlooked-for. A small house and a hundred and fifty pounds a year were not wealth, but to Mr. Hope and his wife, whom he speedily brought to the first home he had ever possessed, it was ease and competence, and they entered upon its possession with hope and gratitude. Here the three eldest children, daughters all, were born, and the house and the income were alike taxed to meet the demands upon them. The incumbent's duties fully occupied his whole time, while his sti-

pend forbade all thought of help by means of a curate—so that, with a growing family to provide for, Mr. Hope found himself unable to use his literary talents, as he had done when a bachelor, to eke out his curate's salary.

But they put a brave heart and a brave face upon all their trials and difficulties, and Mrs. Hope, as we have said, was the stay and support of the house.

At last to these three daughters was added the twin-sons, and then indeed parents, and house, and income were almost overwhelmed ; but the burden is fitted to the back, and though we may at times reel and stagger under it, aye, even fall prostrate and lie for a while senseless and motionless, we must bear and bear on, until we find our shoulders easing under their load, or until it please the Hand that placed it there to remove it.

There is a burden intolerable to bear, a burden which is *not* fitted to our backs, and to which no amount of endurance can reconcile us, the burden of our own wilful sins and transgressions. Beneath that we stagger and labour and moan ; to that, self-imposed as it is, the strongest and broadest shoulders

never become altogether accustomed, and he who bears it can never more know peace and comfort, till, wounded and bleeding, he casts it at the feet of the great Master, and receives absolution and healing.

And yet another burden there is, grievous and difficult to bear: a burden which weighs upon the heart rather than the back, which saps and curdles our very life-strings, undermining health of body and mind, blackening the very face of the Heavens. A burden to which we will not own if we can help it, a burden whose exceeding bitterness lies in this, that it is heaped upon us by the treachery of those we have most loved and trusted—our very faith, our very love, the weapons used to crush us! a burden which is not of God, but of man, our fellow-man. Aye! this indeed is bitter and grievous to bear, intolerable in its newness, galling to the last, and of this burden, too, there is but one way to be quit; only, when, with heart and soul, we begin to pray—"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," do we find the smart and agony relax, the burden shrink and lighten.

God's burdens are nicely fitted to our strength, and whether they assume the aspect of sickness, poverty, or calamity, they bring with them their own healing. But the burdens of our own and others' inflicting, are a fungus growth, poisonous from the root upwards, and if we would not perish beneath their taint we must fly to the Great Healer, who alone can help and save us.

At length, the brave and long-protracted struggle came to a close. Mr. Hope's name had for some time been honourably distinguished among his fellow-labourers, and the Bishop of his diocese, asked by a lay friend to recommend to him a working clergyman of moderate views, to replace an aged incumbent upon the eve of death, bethought himself of Mr. Hope with his numerous family, and before long the out-grown house and stipend which had formed their first home were exchanged for the comfortable rectory of Coombe, with its more liberal salary, where they had now for nearly twenty years resided.

Mr. Hope's study gave evidence of the mingled lay and clerical nature of his pursuits. A

large old-fashioned Bible held the place of honour on a reading stand on one side of the fire-place, while before it was a writing table, with nests of drawers, strewn with manuscripts and books of reference, and all that litter of literary occupation, as dear and as necessary to its real followers, as the litter of the painting-room to the artist.

Here in the early days of his bereavement, while his wife still lay unburied, he took refuge, to wrestle with his grief and to acquire that resignation which, as a Christian pastor, and the head of a family, it was his bounden duty to exhibit.

But it was a hard task, for gentle and undemonstrative as Mrs. Hope had been, there was an under-current of strength and courage upon which her husband had often drawn, and upon which he had to a great extent habitually learnt to rely. Though her illness of many months, and his own absorption in his pursuits, had somewhat weakened the daily tie, still, it was one thing to know that there she was, only a few rooms off, ever ready to listen and advise, and quite another to know that the loving eyes were closed on

this world for ever, the gentle voice hushed, the sympathising, courageous spirit fled.

The married daughters, summoned during the last weeks of illness, were still inmates of their father's house, though the funeral was over, and a lovely spot in the peaceful churchyard held all that remained of the beloved wife and mother.

The long anxious watching, the heavy burden of concealment, and the final passionate outburst of grief, when all was over, had brought Adrienne serious illness; and as she lay tossing in burning fever, calling passionately on her mother to come and help her, neither sister could tear herself away from the house of mourning and sickness, leaving the afflicted father and his youngest born in suffering and distress.

It was the first serious illness Adrienne had known, and for a time the very strength of her constitution seemed to feed the fierce and raging fever. For days her life was despaired of, and when at last the crisis came, and from tossing and raving she sunk into heavy torpor, it was but a wreck of the healthy, vigorous girl which lay there, pale

and wan, with sunken eyes and pinched nose, the beautiful golden curls cut close, and the brilliant complexion gone. Between life and death Adrienne hung for long days, and the imminent danger of this darling of the household threw into shade even the heavy bereavement so lately sustained.

But youth, with its untaxed strength of constitution, carried the day. Wonderful is the tenacity of life, even among the worn and weary—what long years of aches, and pains, and tortures, these exquisitely-framed bodies of ours endure, and yet life holds its seat.

Adrienne's convalescence was slow, but sure; and her return to health being watched by her favourite sister, she would fain have lengthened the days if she could.

The young girl shrunk from the loneliness of home with only her father, and herself, and old Peggy, to inhabit it; but as she gained strength, this dread lessened, and by the time she was well enough to be left, she had entered with increased zest and activity into the duties which would henceforth devolve upon her alone.

There is no panacea so unfailing for all the

ills to which flesh is heir --save sickness—as
work—

“Get leave to work
In this world, 'tis the best you get at all ;
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts,
Than men in benediction. * * *
* * * Get work, get work .
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get.”

CHAPTER VII.

ADRIENNE had completed her fifteenth year just a few days before her mother's death. From a child, somewhat precocious, as children are apt to be when brought up with persons older than themselves, the year of watching and nursing by her mother's side had developed the child into the young girl. Tall of stature, and staid in deportment, the sister who had gone to a married home in a distant county and had not seen Adrienne for two years, could scarcely recognise at first sight the merry joyous child she had left behind. And when Adrienne at length attained convalescence it was a lovely young woman who took her mother's place in the

household, henceforth to be her father's friend and companion.

Peggy, more tenderly devoted to her mistress than ever, was Adrienne's right hand in domestic economies and management; for though sorrow and suffering will deepen and ripen character, housekeeping and accounts are fruits of another growth; and not even these simple every day necessities will come without learning and practice. Of joints of meat—profitable or unprofitable—of the thousand and one nice little points which constitute the difference between economy and waste, between good and bad housekeeping, Adrienne, like most young girls of the present day—had much to learn, for though she had at times assisted her mother, it is only when we stand alone, responsible agents, that we really learn and apply.

But Peggy was a safe guide in domestic matters, and the rector's table was as well supplied, the rector's linen as well washed and mended, as ever. While Adrienne's constant presence, and active superintendence among the poor—for into this branch of duty she entered with loving zest, visiting the sick

and old, teaching in the schools, living with and among them—not only relieved her father from considerable labour and fatigue, but served to strengthen and develop her own character.

Adrienne's great passion was for music. As a child, almost a baby, certainly long before the little mouth could form articulate words, she would catch from her sister's lips, as they played with her, or danced her upon their knees, snatches of songs and melody. A capital little mimic, it was their delight to teach the bright wee toddle all sorts of fun and drollery; and when five or six years old, there were few of her sisters' songs, or the hymns in common use, that were not to be heard carolled about the house or garden in a clear sweet piping voice, which at fifteen was settling into a deep rich contralto.

Mrs. Hope having educated her eldest daughters, left them in their turn to educate Adrienne, and as both teachers and pupil made fun of the early lessons, and Adrienne was naturally sharp and quick, the foundation was laid with pleasurable associations, and the habit of acquiring being thus fostered,

Adrienne's after studies were labours of love, which, when left to herself, it was still her delight to continue.

But music was the crowning delight of all, and as this talent was unmistakably developed, the indulgent parents, not, it may be imagined, without a great effort, had done their best to encourage it; and Adrienne, grounded by her favourite sister, herself no mean performer, prosecuted her studies with unflagging energy and delight. The musical library at her command was not very large; but Handel, Haydn, and Mozart are substantial food for juvenile musical digestion, and these, with Moore's Irish melodies, and a few stray songs and concerted pieces, and church hymns, had hitherto formed the whole of Adrienne's *répertoire*. Mozart's Twelfth Mass was her especial favourite. She knew it by heart from beginning to end, and never failed to find fresh enjoyment, fresh beauties, in every repetition. And soon it was no slight treat to hear that pure rich voice bursting into the Gloria Excelsis, rising and swelling with the noble harmony, her whole heart and soul in every chord she

struck, every note she uttered, feeling and looking a rapt enthusiast.

Some among the school children had sweet young voices, and soon it became Adrienne's ambition to train a choir for the church, and, with her father's permission, she set earnestly to work. His study was out of hearing, and so the practice could be daily and steadily followed, and the result proved satisfactory.

The village and rectory of Coombe formed the out-lying portion of a large estate. Some four or five years after Mr. Hope had been installed in the living, the squire, a hard-drinking fox-hunting squire, after the fashion of the squires of those days, had died suddenly, leaving an only son just entering his tenth year, whose mother had perished in giving him birth. The house was soon after shut up, the boy sent to Eton, thence to college, upon leaving which, as he was not to come of age until five and twenty, he undertook the *grand tour*, and, well amused on the continent, had remained there until the time arrived for taking possession of the estate.

All through the summer of Mrs. Hope's illness, great preparations had been making at

the Hall for the return of the heir ; but as the Hall and the rectory were nearly ten miles apart, and the rural population of Devonshire is not a locomotive one, little save this fact had reached the inhabitants of the latter. Their own sorrows and anxieties had afterwards fully engrossed their time and thoughts, and thus the return of the young squire, so eagerly looked for elsewhere, was not of much moment here.

The hall itself was in October full of bustle and animation. The young squire was daily sending down grooms, horses, and dogs, in preparation for taking the field, and entering upon the duties of his hereditary office of master of the hounds. During his long minority the fox-hounds had existed as a subscription pack, but the new squire had announced his intention of returning to the good old fashion of his forefathers and hunting the country himself. He was in consequence looked upon as one of the right sort, and from that moment his return was dwelt upon with high expectations, and greeted with downright enthusiasm.

A hearty, cheery young man he was—not

troubled with too much brains—but genial and social, and delighting to have every one about him happy. That he liked society was soon evident, for he brought with him a goodly party of men, and as one set of visitors departed another took their place. The season was unusually favourable, the weather good, and foxes plentiful, and what between fox-hunting and coursing, dinner parties at home and abroad, for the young squire was fêted and caressed, and Christmas festivities of unusual number and dimensions in honour of his majority, the time sped gaily away.

The rector and the young squire had exchanged calls, but there the courtesies had ended, for the gay doings at the Hall, at no time especially suited to the gravity of the cloth, were at this moment singularly unfit. The winter months rolled swiftly on at the Hall, and peacefully at the rectory, two little worlds as yet quite separate, yet across the gulf between them a bridge was ere long to be thrown.

Among the guests at the Hall, early in March, was Lord Charles Luttrell. Two or three years younger than the squire, they had

nevertheless been chums at College—wine parties and horse-flesh being the bond of sympathy between them. Bold riders both, hunting was the link which still united them, and Lord Charles's acceptance of the youngsquire's hearty invitation to come as soon as he could, and to stay as long as possible, was the first renewal of their college intimacy.

March in Devonshire is often a lovely month; frost and snow rarely linger in that mild climate after the dark days of February, and the brisk winds of March, fresh and invigorating, dry up the wet lanes and fields, and send the blood tingling with renewed vigour through the veins. Primroses star the banks, green through the winter with bramble and ivy, and grass, and wild-growth of a thousand kinds; and the sweet white and purple violet are to be found here and there in woodland nooks, while the ground is already carpeted with wood anemones and the transparent, delicately veined cup of the wild sorrel.

But it is not of these things hunters think as they ride through deep lanes and cross roads to the meet, rejoicing in the perfect

weather which will let the scent lie and afford them a splendid day's run.

A large gay party were thus wending their way on a day as fine as hunter's heart could desire. The young squire and Lord Charles rode side by side, both splendidly mounted, as were indeed most of the party. The meet was near at hand, so that only one or two "heavy weights" had thought it needful to ride to cover on hacks. The squire and his friend, it need scarcely be said, were not heavy weights, though the former, with his broad shoulders and large limbs, bade fair to come under that head before many seasons should have passed over him. Lord Charles, though tall, well proportioned and well developed, looked slight by the side of his brawny friend, and his clear, ringing voice sounded almost a treble to the sonorous bass of the squire.

The young men were in high spirits and rode leisurely forward, that their horses might be fresh for the start, beguiling the way with jest and laughter, and merry chat.

Hunting in this portion of Devonshire is for the most part easy. The chief danger to

be avoided being a steep bank and a hedge, with a narrow lane beyond, a trap into which strangers to the country are not unlikely to fall, for the bank and hedge often effectually conceal the deep lane below, and a broken back to man or beast is the pretty certain consequence of being caught therein.

The squire cautioned his friend upon this point, and as it was his first field day in these parts, advised him to stick close to him.

The meet was large, and a beautiful sight it was, with the dark glossy coats of the impatient horses, the scarlet and white of their riders, standing out in bright relief from the green ground and hedges around, and the suppressed excitement of the dogs, a young and unskilled one every now and then giving tongue, to be whipped and cowed by the huntsman. It was not long before they found; and then, to the deep baying of the hounds, and the view-halloo of the huntsman, away went the field at a gallop, over hedge, and ditch, and five-barred gates; the fox leading straight ahead for a bit. The Squire and Lord Charles rode well up to the hounds. Their horses, high-couraged, well-trained

animals, no sooner heard the well known break from cover, than, wild with excitement, they answered at once to the slackened rein, and eager as their riders, knowing as well their business, bounded off in a long elastic gallop, speedily leaving all but a few of the best mounted behind. For five or six miles Reynard kept a pretty straight line, then doubling up a dry rocky water-course, the hounds were for a few seconds at fault, while Reynard slipped over the brow of the hill. It was for a few seconds only that the scent was lost, and then dogs, horses, and riders, with renewed efforts set off on the trail. Sharp work it was, well suited to try the mettle of both man and beast, and the riders grew thinner. The squire and Lord Charles still held their own, but the squire's extra weight began to tell, and at the last ascent he was left somewhat behind. Away went the fox and the dogs, Lord Charles leading, and the huntsman next, then the squire and the others following as they could. Every nerve of horse and rider was taxed to the utmost. The open country had been left behind, and at gate or hedge, over or through,

flew or broke Reynard, dogs, and horses. Suddenly, a loud fierce shout rang through the air, "Not there, for God's sake, not there!" the shout of two voices at the same moment, but as it left the stentorian lungs, before it could reach the ears for which it was intended, there was the glint of a scarlet coat and a horse's shoes as, head foremost, rider and horse disappeared; then a heavy thud and crash, and a cry of distress, not from the fallen man, but from the squire and huntsman whose shout it was that had sought to save, and from whom involuntarily proceeded this expression of terror and pain.

Lord Charles was caught in the stranger's trap, and with blanched face and trembling limbs, the squire and the huntsman made for a gate at the end of the field which led into the lane, and hastened to the scene of the accident. The deep fall and the enormous impetus of the force at which they were going, had freed the rider from his horse, sent him over his head in the act of falling, and he lay senseless and motionless against the opposite bank, his right leg doubled under him, and his arms over his head.

Pale as death, senseless and motionless, the squire believed his friend to be dead. He took one of the hands into his own ; cold and clammy, it struck terror to his heart, and the limbs of the stalwart man trembled so beneath him that he had scarcely strength left to assist the huntsman to raise the body and lay it straight. Both believed Lord Charles to be dead, how could a man sustain such a fall and live ? The very horse lay stiff and stark, his neck broken.

But as the huntsman proceeded to straighten the broken leg, something like a groan startled them both. The squire hastily unbuttoned the closed coat, and laying his hand on the heart thought he felt a slight fluttering. By this time the two or three men in sight of the accident had come up, the hounds had gone forward, and the rest of the hunt, unconscious of mischief, had followed by the gate over which the squire had entered the lane.

To take this gate off its hinges and with hastily cut boughs, and coats and waistcoats, to form as easy a litter as they could, was the work of a few moments.

A second groan, louder than the first, as

they lifted the senseless man to the rough litter, showed that though, to all appearance, mortally injured, he still lived, and it became all important to get him at once to shelter and to procure medical aid.

Where to take him was the question, a question the huntsman settled at once.

"We are near by the village of Coombe," said the man, "the rectory is the place to take him, and while we carry him gently along, you, sir," turning to a bystander, "can ride for Dr. Brown, and bring him at once."

The advice was straightforward and sensible, and was acted upon immediately. The squire and the huntsman, and two others, lifted the litter as carefully and gently as possible, while the fifth man, having hailed a couple of ploughmen in the distance, gave the three horses and the poor dead brute in charge, and mounting rode off to seek Dr. Brown.

The motion of the litter, gently as the men moved, roused the sufferer to a certain sense of pain, expressed in faint groans, but he remained unconscious as ever. The lane in which the accident had occurred, led at a short distance, past the rectory paddocks, to

Coombe village. The huntsman knew the ground well, and as they came opposite the paddock he called to a boy to open the gate, and bidding him follow to render a like service further on, proceeded to bear the burden to the back door of the rectory.

The boy was in the rector's service, and though surprise and fear appeared to blunt his faculties at first, by the time the second paddock was half crossed, he seemed suddenly to awaken to the real state of affairs, and pulling his fore-lock, and scraping his leg, said,

"Shall I run on, and tell Peggy you be coming, sir."

"By all means, my lad," said the squire, "and say Squire Harcourt wants a bed for a wounded friend."

The boy ran on, and dashing into the kitchen seized Peggy by the arm, pulling her with him, exclaiming—

"The squire be coming with a dead man on a gate, and he says as how he wants you to give him a bed."

By this time the four men had reached the door with their burden, and as they stood

there stripped to their shirts and trousers, the injured man lying stunned and ghastly on the crimson coats, Peggy took in at a glance all that had happened, and bidding them follow her to the front of the house ran forward to summon the rector. Adrienne fortunately was in the village. To get the sufferer into the house and then into a bed-room on the ground floor, adjoining Mr. Hope's study—a bed-room he had occupied during his wife's illness, and had continued to occupy ever since, was not the work of many minutes.

With Peggy's assistance, the still senseless man was partially undressed and laid upon the bed, groans telling of the acute pain caused by handling. The moments were precious, and still Dr. Brown did not arrive.

The squire and Peggy applied wet cloths to the sufferer's head, and the former tried to force brandy between the clenched teeth, but to no purpose. Anxiously they watched for the doctor's appearance, and great was the feeling of relief to all when at length he was seen rapidly riding to the house. A few hurried words of explanation

from the squire as they crossed the hall to the bed-room, explained the state of the case, and a very short examination of the patient showed dangerous concussion of the brain, and a compound fracture of the leg. What other injuries there might be he could not yet say, but Mr. —, of Exeter, must be sent for at once, and the patient's father or mother or nearest relative be summoned.

“He has youth in his favour, and that is all that can be said at present. His escape from instant death was little short of a miracle, and his recovery will scarcely be less so.”

With this, Dr. Brown proceeded to render what help he could. The squire set off to summon the surgeon from Exeter, and the Marquis of —, Lord Charles's father (his mother was long since dead), leaving the sick man to the care of the rector's family until his own people could arrive.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR many days the injured man lay on the verge of death.

By the time his father arrived from London the surgeon from Exeter had set the broken limb, and with Dr. Brown had done all that could be done to aid and relieve. But the struggle between life and death was of too perilous a nature to bear interference. The patient's youth and strength were his best allies. Fortunately for the human race, the advance of medical enlightenment during the last quarter of a century has taught reliance upon the efforts of nature, rather than upon drugs and the lancet, so that provincial as the physician and surgeon were, they were content to do little and trust much.

The marquis, alarmed at the condition of the son to whose succession as his heir he had looked in the not unlikely event of the death of his sickly eldest born, summoned immediately the best surgical and medical advice London could afford. The great men came, and met in consultation, Dr. Brown and the surgeon from Exeter ; the latter a man of considerable skill and county reputation ; examined the patient, approved of all which had been done, offered a few suggestions under probable contingencies, and pocketing their enormous fees, returned to London, leaving behind as the one real gain of their visit, the satisfaction to the marquis's mind that all had been done which could be done, and that, come what might, he could neither blame himself nor be blamed by others.

The marquis was a somewhat fussy methodical, punctilious man, a stickler for the etiquettes and proprieties of his station—a man whose moral standard was wholly external—a barometer, as it were, influenced by the atmosphere in which he lived.

The first shock of his son's condition over—assured, at the cost of some two hundred

guineas, that nothing more could be done than had been done already, the marquis's thoughts speedily turned to the inconveniences of the position. How unlucky that the accident, if occur it must, had not occurred in the vicinity of the hall. What a sad trouble and burden so long an illness, as at the best it must be, would prove to the rector and his family, and how inadequate the resources of the rectory must be to meet the emergencies of the case.

Pondering thus on the perplexities of the situation, not a little enhanced by the fact that the mistress of the small household was a lovely young girl, the marquis resolved to urge upon the medical men the expediency, if it were any way possible, of removing the patient to the hall ; and so long had he been in the habit of receiving almost blind submission to his will and wishes, that it was not without considerable dissatisfaction he found himself compelled to submit to their very decided refusal to entertain the proposition, and to bow with the best grace he could to the circumstances about him.

Mrs. Hope's bedroom and the large old-

fashioned drawing-room with its sunny bow window, were placed at the marquis's disposal. Peggy's talents as a housekeeper rose with the emergency. Her sympathy with the sick and suffering, always a distinguishing characteristic, was fully enlisted on behalf of the fine young man—"a lord too," who lay helpless as an infant on the rector's bed, looking more like a corpse than a living creature.

Peggy's greatest trial was with the two valets. She was not accustomed to men folks about the place, and two such fine gentlemen, dressed every bit as well as their masters, and with manners as grand and commanding, sorely perplexed and annoyed her. Where to put them, what to give them to eat, were difficult points. And in the midst of all the confusion and disturbance this sudden inroad upon the quiet routine of the rectory caused, Peggy was at fault nowhere but here.

"Indeed, then," she said at last, in despair, "Miss Adrienne, them two fine London chaps will be the death of me after all. Mister Simpson can't eat cold meat, and Mister Smith can't abide hash. So what I am to

give the dainty fellows for their dinners and suppers, the good Lord only knows."

It was the third day after the accident when this dilemma occurred. The young master still lay between life and death, but cold meat and hash were uppermost in the servants' minds, to Peggy's infinite disgust, who, in her own faithful love and devotion to the family she served, had no comprehension of the purely commercial relation between master and servant which the march of intellect has unfortunately developed.

Quietly and unobtrusively Adrienne did everything she could to supply the sudden requirements demanded of them, and so well did she and Peggy, aided by the squire, succeed in ministering to the comfort of the marquis in particular, and the increased household in general, that on the evening of this the third day, as the marquis, strolling in the garden, fell in with Adrienne, he not only warmly expressed his sense of her kind services and attention, but asked her opinion as to the advisability of summoning his daughter to divide with them the care and responsibility of the nursing.

The night before the sufferer had shown signs of amendment, and Dr. Brown, who had scarcely left his side from the moment he had first entered the house, had announced that morning that consciousness had returned, but that the life of the patient hung upon so slender a thread, that sudden noise or the slightest excitement of any kind must inevitably prove fatal. No one but Smith was allowed to enter the room.

However distasteful the man's manners might be to honest Peggy, he had a quality peculiar to the higher grade of his calling—noiselessness of step and movement, a quality essential in a sick room, and for the absence of which nothing else can atone. Only those who have themselves known what brain or nerve disease is can appreciate the torture of a heavy footfall or a clumsy movement—the elysium of a light step and a skilful hand.

From the moment of returning consciousness, the patient slowly but steadily mended, if that can be called mending which consists of progression visible only to the professional eye, or rather hand, for it is by the sense

of touch—the pulse, the skin—that the earliest indications are afforded. The concussion was a serious one, and for days and weeks the young man still hovered on the brink of the grave.

Squire Harcourt proved an invaluable aid to the rector and his daughter. Terribly grieved and cut up that so serious a mischance should have happened to his friend and guest, feeling as though he were himself in some sort to blame, the stalwart man evinced almost a woman's tenderness and consideration in the thousand and one suggestions he made for the ease and comfort of all concerned, and never tired of riding to the neighbouring town for anything which was required, and which the resources of the hall could not supply. Wine, fruit, vegetables, flowers—these reached the rectory in such abundance that Peggy and Adrienne were overwhelmed. The squire's frank, hearty cordiality of manner had placed the young girl at her ease with him at once, and before ten days were over she had come to look to him as she would have looked to an elder brother, to consult with him in every difficulty, and rely upon his aid and assistance.

As the patient progressed, and the more imminent danger subsided, the marquis became fussy and troublesome. Though every post brought him letters and newspapers, and the squire came loaded with books, placed his safest and quietest hack at the marquis's disposal, and was at all times ready to walk, ride, or drive with him, the days hung heavily on his hands, till from tormenting himself, he began to torment those about him. Here again the squire came to the rescue, and urged an adjournment to the hall, where the marquis could be speedily summoned if any untoward change should occur. But to this the marquis objected. He could not think of leaving so serious a responsibility to the rector and his daughter, already so heavily taxed; and as it was not possible to tell him the truth and show him how he was himself the heaviest portion of the burden, the subject had to be dropped.

Whether something of this fidgetty uneasiness betrayed itself in his letters home, or that the invalid son and daughter who lived with him, knowing their father, thought his presence likely to retard rather than favour their

brother's return to health, never became known. But certain it is that at the end of a fortnight, when Dr. Brown and his colleague had pronounced that unless a relapse should take place, time and care were all that were now needed for the young man's recovery, the marquis announced his intention of returning to town, at the same time asking permission of the rector and his daughter for the Lady Florence to take his place.

"She is young," the marquis said to Mr. Hope, as he preferred the request with the exquisite courtesy which belongs to high breeding—"Young, but experienced; for the sad state of my eldest son's health demands constant care and thought, and Lady Florence is his chief companion; so that I think your estimable daughter will find her at once a help and a comfort. She will, with your permission, bring with her a servant who has been many years in the family, and will I am sure be only too glad to do all in her power both to nurse my son and to relieve your own faithful domestic. I can never sufficiently express my gratitude for the very amiable way in which you and Miss Hope have afforded us

hospitality in this distressing emergency, and must beg of you to add another obligation to the many already conferred, by taking charge of an account I have opened in your name at the bank in the neighbouring town, and upon which I beg you will draw for all expenses, past and to come."

If the marquis were a fidget, he was also a gentleman and a just man. Peggy's eyes and mouth opened wide with astonishment and delight when Mr. Simpson presented her from his master with a ten-pound note, and his thanks for the services she had rendered.

CHAPTER IX.

It was a lovely April evening some four weeks later. The rectory fields and garden were glowing emerald green beneath the fast sinking sun, and the fresh sweet smell of spring verdure, with its rich full sap, was wafting in at open windows and doors. The day had been a true April day--gleamy and showery, and the clear drops of the last rain still hung on leaf and grass, glittering like diamonds or dew-drops in the sunlight. Every thing in nature was fresh, and sweet, and lovely--instinct with young life--and the thrush and the blackbird poured forth their rich notes from the neighbouring shrubs and trees, breaking the silence with deep and luscious carol. It was one of those spring evenings

which stir the heart and rouse the blood even of the middle-aged and old—and there sat in the bay window of the old fashioned rectory drawing-room, drinking in the sweetness and freshness of the scene, two youthful maidens, themselves in the spring time of life—lovely and pure as the nature around them.

Raven-tressed Florence, golden-haired Adrienne, as you sat there wrapped in silver silence, scenting the balmy air, listening to the distant lowing of cows and the nearer song of birds—was it thought or feeling which sent the blood, warm and glowing, through your young veins? Brown eyes and blue—wells both of thought and feeling, whose waters were yet untroubled—waiting the approach of that angel, who as a spirit of light or darkness, comes inevitably to us all.

Who shall tell the vague, sweet waking-dreams, the tumultuous throng of hopes and wishes, the lofty aspirations and desires—shadows even to the dreamers themselves—which stir the hearts of the young and pure with blind passion. Passion of mind, and soul, and heart, of the whole being—vague and objectless passion, but passion still. Passion is the

key-stone of humanity, without which in its highest development, neither love nor poetry, nor music, nor painting—all which lifts us so immeasurably above the level of animal life—could exist. Passion, the dream of the young and pure, the fruition of the nobly matured, the vast lever of all that is great and heroic in times past, present, and to come—the great kindling heat of the universe, which purifies all it touches. Take from man passion, and you take from him all that distinguishes him from the beasts of the field—degrade, in your thought or life, passion into lust, and you make yourself as one of these.

The passion and poetry of that April evening—for nature has its hours of both, and speaks to our hearts and senses in unmistakable language, if only we will consent to listen—flooded the souls of those young girls, and kept them for a while silent and spell-bound.

Florence Luttrell, four years Adrienne's senior, and, as compared to her, an experienced woman of the world, well educated and accomplished, had in three short weeks learned to love her young companion like a sister ;

while Adrienne in her turn looked up to Florence as a creature of a higher sphere. It was the first time she had been brought into close contact with a well-bred, highly educated woman, and the charm both of manner and conversation took her young fancy and affections captive.

"I wonder, Adrienne, when Charles will be allowed to leave his room and join us here," Florence said, suddenly breaking the silence. "He is getting weary of the solitude and confinement, and longs to leave, if only for a few hours, the bed and room where he has suffered so intensely. Poor fellow, it is the first serious illness he has ever had ; I do not wonder he is getting impatient."

"How strange it seems," replied Adrienne, "that your elder brother should have been an invalid through life, scarcely ever knowing a day's health, and that your younger should be so robust and strong, for Mr. Harcourt tells me he was famous at college in all athletic games and exercises—an indefatigable rower and rider."

"Yes, Charles was always a strong healthy boy, and I have heard my father say that at

five years old he was as tall as poor Edward at seven, and much more robust. I believe it is thought, or rather suspected, that my elder brother met with some injury to his spine as a baby, but the fact could never be ascertained. Whatever the cause, certain it is that as boy and man he has been a sad sufferer; poor fellow, I often wonder at his sweetness and patience."

"How does he manage to pass his time, now you are away from him, dear Florence," asked Adrienne affectionately, "he must miss you dreadfully."

"That he does, I am sure, but not so much as you would think. He is a great reader, and between you and me, for I am sure you will keep his secret, Adrienne, he amuses himself by writing poetry and sending it anonymously to the magazines and papers. The hope of having it accepted, and the pleasure of seeing it in print, make a pleasant little diversion for us both. We mean some day to gather all these fugitive pieces together and publish them in a volume. He has written some lovely things, and is occupied

just now with a dramatic sketch which promises to be very good."

"Oh," exclaimed Adrienne, "how I do envy any one who can write poetry—I mean any one who can put into language all the thousand thoughts and feelings we dare not whisper even to ourselves in prose. Such poetry as Mrs. Browning's, for instance; often, as I go about among the poor people here, and listen to their trials and sorrows, thoughts come into my head, and feelings into my heart, which only some line of hers, or a verse here and there in the grand old psalms can express, and then I long for some utterance of my own."

"And Browning?" said Florence. "Pray what do you think about him?"

"I do not know; I cannot read Browning, or at least understand him when I do read him. It sounds very fine and clever, and every now and then one comes on a noble passage—a thought which thrills through one like a grand chord of Beethoven, but then again there are whole pages—page after page—where the meaning seems to elude one,

and I go on reading, and wondering what it all means, till I become quite confused and bothered, and am obliged to get a run in the garden, or a quarter of an hour at the piano, to clear my bewildered brains."

"Delightful," laughed Florence, "you child of nature! I suspect half his readers feel as you do, but scarcely one among them would dare to say so. Edward and I often have fights about Browning. He maintains that he is a great poet; I that he is a great scholar, and a fine thinker, but that he has willed to express himself in poetry, was not driven to it by the bent of his genius, but has made that form his deliberate choice. Now Mrs. Browning and Adelaide Procter are poets of God's making—not their own—they have had no choice in the matter, could not have expressed themselves other than they have. Song is as natural to them as to the bird on yonder bush, and so they sing, and the world listens; and as the song of the thrush and the nightingale charms equally sage and simple, so wherever their songs are heard people listen and remember, and, as you say, circumstances in our own lives

spontaneously bring to our memories thoughts and lines of these—the true poets—who sing from the heart to the heart, and so possess the souls of humanity.”

“Adelaide Procter, I do not know her poems,” said Adrienne, “have you them, will you lend them to me?”

“She is not known by name yet, dear, but thousands read her poems published anonymously in “Household Words,” and once reading, never forget. A true child of song herself, she is the daughter of Barry Cornwall, England’s sweet songster, and a niche of fame by his side already awaits her.”

“Oh, I wonder if these are her verses,” said Adrienne taking a bound volume of “Household Words” from the table, and turning to marks between the leaves. “Cleansing Fires.” “One by One.” “Friend Sorrow.” how this last has helped me since my dear mother’s death.”

“Yes, those are Adelaide Procter’s, Adrienne; I know many who like yourself have been helped and comforted by them, but here comes Mr. Harcourt,—good soul that he is—let us go and meet him.”

"How strange it seems," said Adrienne, as they were leaving the room, "that your brother should have been here six weeks, and I should never have seen him yet?"

"Stranger still if you had, lady mine, considering that he was safe in bed, poor fellow, before you knew he was in the house, or in the land of the living, for the matter of that, for I don't suppose, little rustic that you are, that you had ever heard even our names until you found him an unexpected guest beneath your roof."

And as Lady Florence thus laughingly bantered, she passed her arm caressingly through Adrienne's, and thus linked, the friends went to the meeting with the squire.

A fair picture it was. A charming contrast the two girls presented, the golden-haired blonde, the raven-tressed brunette, over whose creamy complexion the faintest pink flush mantled as she stood in the door-way awaiting the squire. Was it the rapid circulation of youth, quickened by movement and mirth, or a feeling of pleasure and gratitude at the sight of the good squire, whose exertions were unflagging in the ser-

vice of his injured friend, which called forth that ghost of a blush, putting a finishing touch to her charms, and making the squire, as they exchanged an evening greeting, mentally resolve that he had never seen her look so lovely and bewitching.

"And how fares the patient?" he asked, "this beautiful evening ought to make even him feel better; I see his window is wide open, so he must be enjoying the freshness and sweetness of the air."

"Oh, he is going on famously, thank you, only impatient to get out of his room and play the interesting invalid to us ladies, I tell him. He wants to see the unknown dispenser of the sweet sounds which have cheered and soothed him the last few days, for our good Adrienne here has been singing and playing, to his great delight and mine. I tell her it is a thousand pities such a voice, and such talent should be thrown away; she ought to receive a musical education—she would take the world by storm, with that fine contralto of hers."

"And what would the reverend father say, to having a singing-lady for his daughter," responded the squire.

"Oh, a contralto you, know, need not necessarily be associated with acting and the opera. Oratorios, sacred music, the concert room — these would be her field, and a very charming one it would prove, I should think."

"Who knows what I may come to yet," said Adrienne, laughing, "but, meanwhile, here is Mr. Harcourt, as usual, loaded with good things, flowers, fruits; and I do believe he has brought us those Songs of Mendelssohn we were wishing for the other evening. How kind, and good, and thoughtful you are."

"Who would not be for such bright looks and grateful words, Miss Adrienne," the squire gallantly replied. "I could not get that other music you wanted, Lady Florence, but it will be here in a day or two, and as poor Charles takes such pleasure in your singing and playing, the least one can do is to supply you with music."

"Oh, it is not my singing and playing Charles cares about, Mr. Harcourt. In the first place, he has been able to have as much of that as he wished for all his life long, and

you men, you know, never value what is easy to be had; and, in the next, Charles knows what good music is, and though I pass very well in a crowd, our friend here has the gift—the genius.”

“It is very good and kind of you all to think so well of my music,” said Adrienne, modestly, “but it seems strange to me that what has been my amusement and delight since I was that high,” patting the head of the big dog which always accompanied the Squire, “what has never given me any trouble to acquire, nothing in short, but pure pleasure, should be thought so much of, when my French and Italian, at which I have laboured and struggled in bitterness of spirit, are not allowed to pass muster by her ladyship here—who will insist upon giving me daily lessons and plaguing herself and me with all sorts of exercises and corrections.”

“Yes, we hold school of a morning, Mr. Harcourt, when I can catch Adrienne, who, I do believe, invents excuses to get out of my way.”

“Try me for a pupil, Lady Florence,” pleaded the squire, in a meek tone.

"You, who have been living in France and Italy for the last five years; why you ought to give us both lessons, and so you shall, when Charles is able to come into the parlour and share the advantage."

"But there are other things to be learnt besides French and Italian, Lady Florence, and you would find that though my education has been shamefully neglected, I should be an apt pupil in your hands," continued the squire, with a look of such honest admiration in his frank face, that Lady Florence checked the somewhat sarcastic answer which rose to her lips and escaped any further necessity for reply, by turning towards the house, and saying,

"I will go and see if Charles is awake, and ready to receive you—he has been looking forward to your visit all day."

Was there a whole or half-truth in this evasive reply? If it had any other meaning than the words conveyed, the Squire was too honest of heart himself, too simple, and it may be too much in love with the beautiful sister of his friend to discover it, or to have rested any hope upon it had the suspicion crossed his mind.

CHAPTER X.

It was not long before the patient received the much wished-for permission to be wheeled on a sofa from his own room to the drawing-room.

Adrienne, occupied in the morning as usual with the school and other parochial duties, returned one noon to find Lord Charles comfortably installed in the bay window, his sister seated with some needle work by his side, affecting an industry which would, she knew, give the invalid something to watch and amuse him while it would make no call upon his strength.

The young man's countenance bore evidence of the great peril and suffering through which he had passed. Scarcely half his

former size, the features were sharpened and pinched, the hands white and transparent. The brown hair and beard still thick and vigorous, were the only indications left of the glorious health which had been brought to such an untimely end on that fatal March morning, just two months ago.

The contrast between him and Adrienne was striking, as she entered the room the picture of youth and health, both of mind and body. A braided coronet of bright golden hair crowned her noble head, her fine clear blue eyes beamed with innocent happiness and pleasure, while the heightened glow of natural curiosity and expectation as she was at length about to make the acquaintance of the long unknown guest, gave to her fair complexion the dainty hue of a blush rose, in all its virgin freshness. Lovelier and purer girlhood had never saluted mortal eyes, and Lord Charles felt its instant charm. The delicious voice, the tender and impassioned music, which had, as it were, already made her known in spirit to him, and which had caused him to look forward with intense longing to this meeting, received their crown-

ing charm in the glorious beauty thus suddenly revealed, for though his sister had spoken with admiration of the personal appearance of their young hostess, he was not prepared, perhaps no description could have prepared him, for the rare nature of the beauty he saw before him.

Frankly and cordially Adrienne advanced to the sofa, and congratulated the young man on his release from tedious confinement. The touch of her warm soft hand as it lay for a moment in his, sent a thrill through his frame, a thrill of mingled pleasure and pain, for exhausted by long suffering and illness, his nerves were as sensitive as an infant's, and the very sweetness of the outer air was more than he could at times bear. An irrepressible shudder followed the touch, the shudder as of one magnetised or mesmerised, and the brown eyes which had for a moment sought hers, as the young man muttered a few words of pleasure and gratitude, closed beneath the heavy lids, and the head fell back upon the cushion, the face deadly pale and still. Adrienne uttered a low cry of alarm, while Florence hastened to procure water and salts, and other

feminine restoratives. But the young man put them feebly from him, and muttering,—

“Give me air, I shall be better presently,” the window, which had been closed, was thrown wide open; in a few seconds the deadly pallor disappeared, and the eyes, languidly raised, wandered round the room with a vague expression till they met those of Adrienne, who, quite unconscious of her part in the scene, stood by alarmed and distressed. “I beg your pardon—Miss Hope—you must excuse me—I am weaker even than I thought,” the invalid gasped, but his sister put her hand playfully on his mouth and bade him be silent.

“This comes of our persuading Dr. Brown to let you out of your room too soon, brother mine; it is well he was gone before this happened, or you would have been marched back forthwith and kept in durance vile for another week at least. As it is, Adrienne and I must deprive you of the pleasure of our sweet society for a while. I will send Smith, and you must try and get to sleep, or at all events keep quiet.”

“No, no, Florence, I am all right now,

don't go—don't leave me." The words were for Florence, but the eyes entreated Adrienne.

"Indeed but we must, Charles, so come, Adrienne, you and I will go for a walk while this rash brother of mine rests and recovers himself."

And so saying, Lady Florence comfortably adjusted the pillows, and couvre-pied, and the two girls left the room, the brown eyes of the invalid following their retreating forms with a longing remonstrating expression.

"How dreadfully ill he looks," said Adrienne, as soon as the door closed behind them; "of course I knew he must look ill, but his face was ghastly just now as he lay there. I was quite frightened."

"Oh, it was only over exertion," replied Florence; "he wanted to thank you, and apologise for all the trouble he has given, and it was too much for him. He will be better by-and-by, and we must make him keep quiet, and let us talk and amuse him. He is not generally an excitable person. Edward is, but not Charles, and he will soon get strong now he is allowed to leave his room, but he must be careful at first."

The girls went for their ramble, and the invalid lay on his sofa, too languid to think, in that half-sleeping, half-waking, nervous stupor, which excessive weakness begets, feeling to his fingers' ends the deliciousness of the balmy May breeze as it swept in at the window, and wondering, with a vague, dreamy wonder, why Adrienne Hope's touch should have so upset him, till these dreams gave way to a sweet sleep—the sleep with which nature heals and restores her sick children—sick in mind or body, or both.

The change from the one room, and the cheering companionship of the Squire and the two girls—though of this strong meat Dr. Brown and Florence allowed but homœopathic doses for some days—worked marvels for the young man. Mr. Hope, engaged in preparing a work for the press, on which he based great expectation, had lived more than ever in the privacy of his own study since the unlooked-for invasion of the Rectory. Peggy and Adrienne had undertaken all domestic arrangements, and with signal success so far. Peggy and Smith had long

ago settled their differences, and the staid elderly woman who accompanied Lady Florence had proved an acquisition in the small household.

As the days went on, and Lord Charles steadily progressed, Adrienne, still faithful to the discharge of her morning duties, contrived for the most part to find time for the afternoon readings which had been established; and hours of great enjoyment these were to her active young mind, desirous for information and improvement.

Lord Charles, an eager politician himself, delighted to instruct her in the politics of the day, and was surprised to find how thoroughly well-grounded she was in the history of her own and other countries.

"You have been well taught," he said to her one day.

"In all but French and Italian," she replied, looking archly at Florence, who held up a threatening finger and suggested an instantaneous lesson.

"No, no, we will wait for the Squire and his long-promised Italian reading, but you

quiz the poor fellow so cruelly, Florence, that I do not wonder he puts off the evil moment as long as he can."

"He is a fine specimen of a frank, true-hearted English gentleman," said Lord Charles warmly. "I don't believe a more honest, loyal nature exists. We used to call him 'Gentleman George' at college, because in our loudest mirth and roughest sports he never forgot himself, or suffered others to forget whilst in his presence, that we were, above all things, gentlemen. You do use him a little sharply sometimes, Flory."

"He is like that great big faithful dog of his," said Florence, blushing.

"And like a dog caresses the hand that whips him," suggested Adrienne—then, fearing she had gone too far, she added quickly, "I am sure his thoughtful attention has been more like that of a woman than a man—he has helped Peggy and me again and again in our perplexities, and I don't know what we should have done without him."

"Indeed, Miss Hope, you have been sadly taxed and tried," said Lord Charles, availing himself of this opportunity to express the

thanks which he had not again attempted since the day of the signal breakdown.

"And if I have," she replied, "have I not been more than repaid by gaining the friendship of our dear Florence here? Ah! you do not know," she said fervently, "what a great, great gain, this unlucky accident has proved to me. It has opened a new world to me, given me thoughts and ideas I never had before, enriched me in many ways, taught me to know myself better, enlarged my desires and my hopes, made a woman of me from a child, and to my dying day I shall never, never forget what I have learnt."

"And to my dying day," said Lord Charles, in a low passionate tone, "I shall never forget that Miss Hope first taught me all that a simple, noble nature can accomplish for itself."

His words were not much, but the tone and manner, and the fervent expression of the brown eyes caused Adrienne's to sink before them, while a sweet confusion stole over her, which she sought to hide by abruptly rising. Going to the pianoforte she struck a few rambling chords, then plunged at once into the

Moonlight Sonata which chanced to lay open on the desk before her.

As Adrienne rose, Florence, struck by the tone of her brother's voice, looked up from the drawing on which she was engaged, but there was nothing in his face to tell of emotion; it wore its usual placid, inscrutable expression, and the fervour had passed from the brown eyes—where?—back into the soul of the gazer—or through the blue eyes to the soul of the fascinated victim?

The lovely afternoon was deepening into a fine warm evening, and before the Sonata was finished, a grinding crunch on the gravel, then a firm, somewhat heavy footstep in the hall, and a pattering of dog's feet, announced the approach of the Squire.

Lady Florence bent still closer to her drawing for a few seconds, conscious either that the eyes of her companions were upon her, or that there was something in her own face to conceal; and, as she rose to receive Mr. Harcourt's greeting and caught a penetrating look from her brother, either accidentally or intentionally—who shall say which—she swept the brushes and water glass from the table

with her sleeve, and laughingly reproaching the Squire for her own carelessness, covered the awkwardness of the moment with mirth and jest.

"And pray what procures us the pleasure of your society so early to-day?" she asked, as, everything restored to order, the party re-seated themselves, Adrienne still before the piano, and the big dog stretched at his master's feet.

"I met Dr. Brown this morning while I was out riding, and the day being so warm and fine, I asked him if our patient here might venture out of doors for a bit, and he said yes, provided he could be moved sofa and all, but that that precious leg of his must not be disturbed on any account; so I have brought my man John—he will be here presently from the stable—and I think with him and Smith to assist me I shall get his lordship easily and comfortably, sofa and all, on to the lawn."

"There's a good fellow," exclaimed Lord Charles, "I have been longing all day to lie out under the blue sky, and to look up among the leaves. This peep at both from the win-

dow, pleasant as it is, is tantalizing to a degree; as everything is of which we only get a scrap when we want the whole," and the brown eyes glanced again at Adrienne.

"I am afraid you will get nothing more than a scrap, though on a larger scale, for some time to come, old fellow; but you see we have to content ourselves in this world with what we can get, even though we may long and hope for more."

"If I were a man," said Lady Florence, "and had set my heart on any particular thing, it would go hard but I would obtain it sooner or later. We women are supposed to have no wishes and wills of our own, or if we have, they are to be suppressed, cauterized, burnt out, if necessary."

"Why, Flory," said her brother, "I do believe you will develop into a strong-minded woman by-and-by—stand up for the rights of your sex, and the wrongs of ours, and send all us men to the devil if you can."

"Some of you will not need sending there," said Florence drily; "you have a happy knack of finding that road for yourselves."

"Orpheus went there in search of his wife," replied Lord Charles.

"True, but it was virtue not vice which led poor Eurydice into that scrape, please to remember, and, heathen as you are, I don't suppose you intend to stand by the Pagan belief—brother, mine—which dooms all mankind alike to Hades."

"And why not? the oldest Christian church has incorporated this belief—the purgatory of the Roman Catholics answers to the Hades of the Pagans. But I tell you what, Flory, if we men are apt to find our way in that direction—nine times out of ten it is a woman who sends us there."

"To say nothing of gambling, and drinking, and blaspheming, and the thousand other small vices male flesh is heir to. Eh, Charlie, if you men have the best of it in this world in health and strength, and the power to be and do, as I for one believe you have, I suspect we women will have a better chance in the next, as a holy band of martyrs, if nothing else. But a truce to this badinage. Here come John and Smith, and the rector's daughter looks shocked at our wickedness,"

said Lady Florence, stooping to kiss the fair young brow as she passed the piano. "Come, Adrienne, let us go and choose a warm sheltered nook for this good-for-nothing brother of mine, and leave the squire and his men to bring him to it as they best can."

"What a difference there is in men," said Florence to her companion as they went out into the garden together; "now there is my poor dear Edward, as gentle and pure and single-minded as any young girl. He takes life on the ideal side, knows of course that there are sin and wickedness in the world, but it never seems to enter his mind as a fact; how should it though, for woman as I am, I know more of the world and the world's ways, am brought into closer contact with it than he is, poor fellow. I do not believe there lives a purer, gentler, and simpler human being—man or woman—and yet if I had to rely for advice and assistance upon either of my brothers, even upon some wholly worldly point, it is to Edward I should look, and not Charles, with all his experience and knowledge and natural acuteness."

"And yet Lord Charles must be a more

competent guide and adviser in worldly matters than your invalid brother," said Adrienne. "He has seen so much more of life."

"He has; but of that kind of life which to my thinking does not tend to make a man what a woman, even a sister, can blindly rely upon. He is proud and ambitious, loves power, and these are things which blind the judgment and blunt experience. In fact, Edward is the man of thought—Charles the man of action. The perfect man should unite both characters, but then there is nothing in the world perfect, and we may as well knock our head against a stone wall at once, as set out in life as an optimist."

"The squire seems to me to blend a good deal of thought and action," said Adrienne innocently.

"He is just a good faithful creature, like Lion here," replied Florence, as the big dog came bounding across the lawn to where the two girls stood beneath a large tree, a favourable place for the invalid's couch.

Gently and carefully, Mr. Harcourt directing, the sofa and its burden were carried from the house and deposited by their side.

"This is good," said Lord Charles, drawing a deep breath and filling his lungs with the fresh sweet air. "Many thanks to you, Harcourt, for getting me out here, may you never need such a friend yourself, but if you should, may you find one ready to your hand."

"A good deed brings its own reward," said the squire cheerily, "and now, if Miss Hope will only give us some tea here and let us smoke a cigar after it, I shall have more than met with mine."

"So you are a smoker, Mr. Harcourt?" said Lady Florence, as Adrienne went indoors to order the tea.

"Yes, and so is Luttrell here, do you dislike it?"

"Oh dear no, not in the open air and in moderation, but in smoking, as in many other things, we English began by obstinately setting our faces against it, and have ended by an exaggeration of the habit itself. From a cigar now and then, young men have taken to pipes and Cavendish, from morning until night, and what between the fumes of the smoke and the stale pipes in

their pockets, it is certainly not of 'Araby the blest' they smell when one is unfortunate enough to be brought into close contact with them."

"Well done, Flory, I see you have not forgotten how to act Mrs. Trimmer yet"

"Nor ever shall, Charles, while you men give me such splendid opportunities of exercising my vocation, as Edward calls it."

"Lady Florence is quite right," said the squire, "our young men do carry smoking to a vicious extent. Except among Germans, I have never seen pipe-smoking indulged in as it is in this country. If I thought I should become the slave of this habit, I would burn all my cigars and cigar cases, and never smoke another 'weed' in my life."

"Your cigars are too good to be burnt, Harcourt, except between the slow lips of a practised smoker, so if ever you should reach this pitch of sublime virtue, pray remember that all mankind is not equal to the same effort, and make a deed of gift to your intimates of your choice Havannahs and prime Manillas."

Peggy and Smith soon made their appear-

ance with the tea, and a chatty pleasant meal it proved. The first of several successors.

Fresh air and cheerful companionship are wonderful aids to the restoration of health, and as day by day new life kindled within the young man's veins, and the shrunk cheek and gaunt form resumed their natural roundness, the magnetic power which Adrienne had from the first exercised over him, and which had fed and nursed his vitality, doing more for him than the grosser aids of food and air, deepened and ripened into a passion which threatened to overwhelm all barriers, and against which, to do Lord Charles justice, he had hitherto manfully struggled.

Few young men knew themselves better than he did. His sister had called him proud and ambitious, and proud and ambitious he knew himself to be. Politics was his chosen field, and there was no office so high that he did not hope and believe he might in time attain to it. But these were secret convictions and aspirations, for to pride and ambition he joined an almost preternatural reserve, and not even the closest of his intimates was admitted to the knowledge of his aims and

desires. On the surface he was a cold, silent imperturbable young man; of a temperament rather phlegmatic than sanguine, known to his friends as one sure by patience and perseverance to get on in life, and to his constituents from his first session as a painstaking staunch disciple of his leader, from whom steady adherence and a faithful discharge of his duties might at all times be looked for.

He chafed not a little at the accident which now detained him from the House, and only that the session was so far unimportant, it would have been found no easy matter to restrain him.

As it was, he was no sooner able to get about with the aid of a crutch and stick, than he began to count the days for his return to London. But it was not the leg only which had to be considered; the violent concussion of the brain sustained in his terrible fall had left that organ weak, and it would be at the peril of his life, Dr. Brown told him, if he began work too soon.

Thus forced to prolonged inaction, what wonder that day by day and hour by hour, the subtle sweetness of the passion he had

hitherto mastered was fast mastering him. Love had never entered into his calculations. A more or less prolonged bachelor-hood of work and preparation, leading to an influential marriage—this was all his scheme of life admitted. If with such a bride, love should form also a portion of the dower—why he would be a more fortunate man than his fellows—but, of all the gifts fortune might have in store for him, love was the one which occupied the least of his thoughts, and was the last to be thrown into the scale.

Wise builders are we of our fates. Let us lay the foundations carefully as we may, hedge and fence ourselves in until we think all secure, by some flaw in the foundation, some gap in the cunningly contrived fence, the foe enters and we are at his mercy only the more surely for the very precautions we have taken.

“Since you are leaving us so soon,” said the squire, one evening, “and I cannot persuade Charles to recruit at the Hall before he goes back to town, you must at least do me the favour, Lady Florence and Miss Hope, to induce him to bring you for a ramble over

the house and grounds. It is a fine picturesque old place, and there is a certain ivy-grown gable end which Lady Florence will delight to add to her sketch book."

"We shall only be too pleased," said both young ladies in a breath.

"And as there is no time like the present," added Lord Charles, "let it be to-morrow; for I think the day after I may be obliged to go up to London—nay, Flory, it is no use shaking your head in that wise way—I am getting more harm than good here every hour that I stay—I mean," he added, as a softener to the harsh sound of the words, "that when a man is well enough to fidget and fume over inaction, it is a mistake to keep him in it any longer."

"How dreadfully I shall miss you all," exclaimed Adrienne, aghast at the near approach of the separation.

"That you will, I am sure; and we shall miss you not a little, I can tell you. But you will come and see us in the autumn, when Edward and I, at all events, are sure to be at Park Hall."

"And depend upon it, Flory, if Miss Hope

be there too, I shall not be long away. I have found her too apt a pupil to lose sight of, and with her permission, I will send her books and papers, meanwhile, that she may prosecute her studies alone and keep up with all that is going on."

"You are very kind, very good, both of you," said Adrienne, with tears in her eyes and voice, as she turned to the window to hide so unwonted an emotion.

"The goodness and kindness are on your side, Adrienne dear," said Lady Florence, coming up and putting her arm affectionately about her. "For my part, I do not know how I shall get on without you. I wish that tiresome old Mr. Hunter would die; and then —"

"Florence," said her brother, "do you know what you are saying?"

"O yes, Mentor mine, I know quite well. He has been 'as good as dead' as the village folk say, the last six years, and I am sure it would be a blessing to himself and everyone else if it would please Heaven to take him. He is quite in second childhood, and the whole parish would benefit by his death. Then Mr. Hope would come and take the

living, and we should have this dear Adrienne of ours a near neighbour—Oh, how delightful it would be.”

The blood rushed to Lord Charles's face with so sudden and intense a burning that if Florence and Adrienne had not been standing with their backs towards him, and the Squire too intent upon watching them to have any notice to spare, his secret must have escaped.

Adrienne brought to his very door—a near neighbour, as his sister said, for the parsonage lay within a stone's throw of the Hall—within sight of some of its windows—within the park paling itself! This Adrienne, who every moment was growing dearer and dearer to him—whose eyes and voice penetrated his very soul—whose touch thrilled to his heart's core—this Adrienne, whom even now he was flying—no! this could not, must not be. His whole fate would be altered; and hers? He shuddered, and held his breath. Had he so religiously abstained from look, or touch, or word which could convey more than a friendly kindness—mastering all expression of the passion which he felt eating into his very being, strengthened to master it by the

fact that he could count the struggle by weeks and days, when their lives, so accidentally entangled, would easily and naturally divide—had he done all this and suffered in silence and alone, for fate to bring them into renewed and permanent connection. It could not, must not be. And yet, what more natural, what more probable? His sister's friend, that friend's father one who had done him and his service which could scarcely be repaid in any other way, and which, in this way, could be so effectually and gracefully acknowledged! A dark look of mingled passion and pain passed over his face—his breathing, hitherto checked, as happens in moments of intense feeling or thought—his heart suddenly gave a mighty leap, and a groan involuntarily burst from his lips. The girls started, and with the Squire, ran to the side of the sofa on which he lay. His head was buried in his hands, he could not speak, he dared not shew his face with the expression he felt to be upon it. Florence, alarmed, pulled his hands away; then, with that singular command of countenance which some few of us have by nature, but which more slowly and painfully acquire, he looked

up, and with a calm smile, putting his hand to his breast, said,

“It was a sudden pain here, Flory, a spasm, get me a glass of wine, and I shall be all right.”

Florence and the Squire ran for the wine. Adrienne, furthest from the door, remained by Lord Charles's side between the sofa and window, her hands resting on the back of the couch, her blue eyes fixed upon his face with a look of kindly, almost tender concern and interest. Suddenly the brown eyes were raised and met this look. Drawn irresistibly towards her—towards each other—for their eyes for the first time met in a full and steady gaze, which seemed to reach far down into the souls of either, Lord Charles took Adrienne's hands in his, and still with wondrous self-control, influenced perhaps by their cool, soft touch, he pressed his lips fervently but respectfully upon them, murmuring, in a voice of deep feeling, “God bless and keep you, Adrienne, ever good and happy as you are now.”

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY the following morning the Squire made his appearance at the rectory, in a large old-fashioned comfortable barouche, a family relic, as he laughingly called it; and with a board and cushion across for the broken leg, he comfortably installed Lord Charles and the ladies inside, and himself taking the reins, mounted the box.

It was a glorious May morning, and the whole party were, to all appearance, in high spirits. Lion, the squire's constant companion, ran by the side of the carriage, and, as a well-bred dog should, gave no other sign of his presence than an occasional growl at some canine passer-by of less aristocratic pretensions than himself.

The road lay over hill and dale, through occasional cross lanes, where the family barouche required skilful guiding to keep it clear of the high banks on either side ; by fields of rich red brown, or verdant with young crops ; by patches of sylvan wood, carpeted with the star-like blossoms of the anemone and wild sorrel, while the lark carolled on high, filling the air with sweet music.

More than once, at the request of Florence and Adrienne, the Squire brought the barouche to a stand-still that they might listen to that dainty song. The day was all before them, with its sunny hours of noon and afternoon, and the moon would be up to light their homeward way should they be tempted to prolong their stay late into the evening.

It was a lovely day, and if youth, and health, and freedom from all the petty carking cares of life could give immunity from painful thought and feeling, each one of that small party should have been as joyous as the day was bright.

Florence and Adrienne were truly and thoroughly happy, and if something of conscious shyness mingled with the feeling and

manner of the latter towards Lord Charles, it was a happy consciousness which only deepened the enjoyment of the present moment and was too vague to cast any shadow over the present or the future.

As to Lord Charles, he looked as fresh and bright as the spring morning itself. The sense of renewed health and strength tingling in one's veins after long illness is a panacea against minor evils.

If anything had been wanting to establish harmony and enjoyment, the fresh, hearty beaming countenance of the Squire as he looked down upon them from his high seat must surely have effected it.

"What a lovely county this Devonshire is," exclaimed Lady Florence.

"You would say so, indeed," replied the Squire, "if you could know every mile of it as I do, from the Bristol to the English Channel. Why it combines in miniature the beauties and climates of Switzerland and Italy! The rugged granite rocks of Linton are miniature Alps, while the graceful bays and curves of Torquay and Teignmouth, with their blue waters and mild climate, remind one

of the Mediterranean coast. You, Lady Florence, as an artist, would delight in the cold greys of the one and the warm reds and blues of the other. I say, Charles, can't you keep out of London a little while longer, and we will have this old barouche overhauled and fitted up with imperials, and take a tour through my native county, whose beauties none know better or appreciate more than myself."

"That would be delightful," said the girls.

"Who knows but we may do it at some future time," replied Lord Charles; "but, with your leave, Harcourt, I would rather defer it until I am a sound man—this leg of mine would be a considerable impediment in the way of my enjoyment, at all events."

"Ah, I forgot that, thoughtless fellow that I am. Well, shall it be next year?"

"Who knows what the year may bring forth," said Lord Charles. "Florence's wish of yesterday may have come to pass, and Mr. and Miss Hope may be no longer here, or you may have taken a wife unto yourself, old boy, and Mrs. Harcourt may not care to go gipsy-

ing about the country with your bachelor friends."

"If I should be married by this time next year," said the Squire, keeping his face steadily towards the horses, "I will answer for it that my wife would choose this party, of all others, for the tour. But there is no such luck in store for me, I am afraid."

"And why not? A handsome young squire of good family and unencumbered estate, may pick and choose where he pleases, and is not one to woo in vain. Now I, a younger son, with a pittance never very likely to be much larger, might with some reason despair; for you see if the lady were rich she would in all probability think I wooed her for her money, let me be as enamoured as I might, and if she were poor, what could we both do?"

"I do not believe any woman, however rich she might be, would fail to see when she was really sought for herself," said Lady Florence warmly.

"Then you agree, sage sister of mine, with a great authority on these matters who says, a woman never fails to see when a man is really in love with her, though she often thinks he

is when he is not. Now, even according to this theory, how could our imaginary heiress be quite sure that she was not mistaken."

"No woman, honest and true-hearted herself, can fail to tell the real from the assumed feeling."

"Don't be so sure of that, Flory, we men are gay deceivers—practised hands—and I am inclined to believe that an honest true-hearted woman would be much more likely to be deceived than one who was herself an adept in that art of simulation which the world calls coquetry."

"I hate coquettes and male or female flirting," said the Squire bluffly; "hearts, though they be like sieves, cannot have a constant stream poured into them, without leaving a dirty sediment behind."

"Well done, for a culinary (cool and airy) sentiment suited to your elevated position just now," laughed Lord Charles; and so, with jest and laughter, the ten miles between the rectory and hall were but too speedily got over.

Harcourt Hall was an irregular pile of

building of Tudor origin. But as succeeding squires had needed increased accommodation for family, servants, or stud, they had consulted their own convenience without reference to architectural unity of design. The effect was picturesque rather than imposing, and as the Squire drove up the ancestral avenue—between a row of noble trees, growing with all the rich luxuriance of Devonshire soil and climate, and suddenly turned into the open drive before the house, flanked and backed with trees as noble, throwing out in strong relief the rich red hue of the building, shaded here and there with a thick growth of ivy, Florence's artist eye caught at once the quaint loveliness of the place, while the Squire's cheeks glowed with pleasure as he listened to her enthusiastic expressions of delight.

It was indeed a beautiful old place, a fitting cradle and home for a long race of stalwart sons and fair daughters ; and its last representative was no degenerate scion, as he stood there welcoming his friends with hearty, cordial hospitality, his frank, honest face and clear gray eyes glowing with pride and satis-

faction, his broad shoulders and curly brown head towering even above those of Lord Charles, and his deep bass voice making pleasant music to the ear.

As, with his friend's assistance, Lord Charles left the carriage and ascended the few broad steps which led into the hall, he said,

"You know, Harcourt, I feel quite at home here, so do not let my lameness keep any of you prisoners. I shall rest here a bit while you do the honours of the old house, and when you set off on your rambles through the grounds, you shall give me your arm to some shady spot where I can amuse myself with book and cigar until you return."

The hall of Harcourt Hall was the principal internal feature of the house. It was a lofty and nobly-proportioned square, lighted on the north and south by long narrow windows, whose massive frames proclaimed the work of centuries, broad oak staircases to the east and west leading to an oak gallery which ran round three sides of the hall, and upon which the doors of the principal bed and dressing-rooms opened. Its walls were hung with family pictures, portraits of deceased squires

and their ladies, banners, and arms. For the Harcourts of Harcourt Hall numbered many a doughty warrior among ancestors whose pedigree ran back through long centuries, and whose proud boast it had ever been that the men were brave, the women chaste.

“When the Harcourts of Harcourt Hall
Shall cease in their race to hold
Chaste daughters and sons, brave and bold,
The Harcourts are nearing their fall.”

Thus ran a family distich which the Squire pointed out to the young ladies, embroidered on banners by the fair hands of some among those chaste dames, and illuminated by equally fair hands in the missals and prayer books of the good old days before Luther and Calvin flung the apple of discord into the Christian Church. A rich crimson velvet-pile carpet covered the centre of the hall and stair-case, the dark polished oak of the floors and panelled walls forming an admirable background and setting for pictures and carpet alike. The massive entrance door, also of oak, was on the north side, and immediately facing it was the large open chimney with its heavy stone setting,

bearing the arms and crest of the family, and its huge antique dogs of brass. Nothing but wood had ever been burnt on that hearth, or ever would be burnt while the Harcourts owned a tree—for another distich ran thus, and was cut in rude letters on the stone at the side of the coat of arms:—

“So long as Harcourt, of Harcourt Hall,
Owns forest, or wood, or e’en a tree—
If he would wish to avoid a fall—
Nothing but wood must be burned on me.

For to forest and wood bold Harcourt owes
As guerdon of all his battle-blows—
The wealth and ease of his Squire’s home,
And when this he forgets, he seals his dome.”

“A rough doggerel that,” said Lord Charles, as the Squire read it aloud.

“Yes; it is always a doubt to me whether the rhyme of that last verse was not marred by the fellow who cut the inscription, trying to improve it. You know the Devonshire folk say, ‘coom’ and ‘hoom’ for ‘come’ and ‘home,’ and I suspect the poet was a Devonshire man, and spelt ‘hoom’ as he pronounced it, so that it would have run thus—

‘The wealth and ease of his Squire’s “hoom,”
And when this he forgets he seals his doom.’

The mason from some other county, perhaps, or even from London, having taken upon himself to spell home according to his idea of what was right, found himself compelled to change doom into dome to restore the rhyme."

"Not a bad idea ; but, on the other hand, there is good authority for spelling doom, dome—Domesday Book, to say nothing of Chaucer and Spenser—and though I dare say the rustic poet may never have heard of these last, Domesday must have been even more familiar to him than it is to us."

While Lord Charles and the Squire were discussing this point, Lady Florence was looking at a fine marble copy of the Dying Gladiator of the Capitol, which stood on a black marble pedestal in the centre of the hall, and which had from the first moment attracted her attention.

"I hope you admire my taste," said the Squire, coming up to her. "I no sooner saw that statue in Rome than I determined to have the best copy money could procure, and give it the place of honour here. I think, with the exception of the Venus of Milo, of

which you see there is a cast yonder, it is the finest statue the ancients have left us.

"It is beautiful," Florence replied. "I know it well in engravings and casts, but there is nothing like marble, after all."

"Thorwalsden, I think it was, who said that the clay model might be called creation, the plaster cast death, and the marble resurrection," said Lord Charles, "and it is very true. That is a capital copy of yours, Harcourt--do you remember our going to see about it together in the Via Margutta."

"I envy anyone who knows Rome," exclaimed Florence.

"Rather, those are to be envied who have not seen it," said the Squire, "and who, like yourself, Lady Florence, are sure to see it before long."

"How do I know that? nothing seems less likely at present."

If the language of the Squire's honest eyes could have been rendered audible at that moment, or Florence had been less engaged with the statue before her and could have read their expression for herself, she would have seen as plainly written there, as her

more observant brother did, that she had but to speak the word, and Rome, Italy, all and everything she desired would be within her reach. It may be that she did not need to look at the eyes to read the heart and thought of the Squire, for as she stood there gazing at the statue, a warm flush mantled to her brow, which only some inward motion could have caused, and which made her in the Squire's eyes more lovely than ever.

"Florence is one of those who think a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," said her brother. "Now, for my part, I think one bird in the bush worth two in the hand; it is not what we have, but what we hope to have which makes men of us. It is better to buckle on our harness for the fight than to unbuckle it, having attained all we fought for."

"But you see, brother Charles, I am not a man, and fighting is not, thank Heaven, a woman's vocation—though, Heaven knows," she added quickly, "some poor women have the hardest and bitterest battles to fight. The battle of life has bloodier fields than Agincourt or Cressy, and the battle of right against

might is too often the battle-field for women. But I do not mean to fight even you to day, brother mine, and having thus held out the flag of truce, you cannot for very shame attack me again."

"He must be a bold man, Flory, who would enter the lists against you, but I honour your white flag, and accede to a suspension of hostilities. And now, Miss Hope, tell us what you have been thinking about all this long time you have been gazing at that famous Venus; upon my word, ladies, the statues seem more attractive to you this morning than the flesh and blood of your devoted servants and cavaliers."

"I have been thinking," said Adrienne, thus challenged, "that even in the cast, which you say Thorwalsden calls death, one could almost believe the flesh to be real, it is so wonderfully modelled. Of course I do not know, but it seems to me that this Venus is even more beautiful than the gladiator."

"You are right, Miss Hope, artists and critics alike have pronounced the Venus of Milo to be the finest statue in the world. And now I will tell you something apropos of this

very statue which struck me greatly at the time, and which I have often thought of since. I was once looking at a fine cast of it with George Combe, the phrenologist. I made the same remark you made just now, that the flesh seemed to me more natural, more real, than the flesh of any other statue I had ever seen.

“‘I have a theory on that head,’” said Mr. Combe, “‘and this is it—we talk a great deal about genius, but we know very little of its nature. Now I have observed that people of strong individuality, whether of mind or body, impress themselves upon all they do or touch. There are some people who impress themselves on their very clothes—such or such a hat, or coat, or glove, could only belong to such or such a man. We know it to be his the moment we see it—he has imparted something of himself to it, some *afflatus* or essence which stamps his individuality upon it. Now I believe that the possession of this quality in its highest and most subtle development is an unfailing accompaniment of genius. The man of genius imparts something of himself to all he does or touches, and, in proportion

to the degree in which he possesses this power, is the effect he produces. I look upon this statue as the very highest development of that power the world has ever seen. The plastic art probably admits of its fullest and highest development, because the artist, as he kneads and works at the clay, using his fingers more than his instruments, comes into closer and more direct contact with his material—imparts more of this afflatus or essence than the poet, painter, or musician. Take this suggestion,' he added, 'for what it is worth. I think there will be found to be something in it.' I confess I think there is a great deal in it, and I should like to see the idea thoroughly developed."

"It is certainly true of Beethoven and Mozart, Haydn, Handel, and exquisite Mendelssohn," said Adrienne. "The individuality of each is unmistakable. The master has in each instance impressed himself indelibly upon his creations. No one, with any musical knowledge, nay, even with music in his soul, could for a moment give the works of one to the other."

"True also of the great poets, ancient and

modern—Horace, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Wordsworth,—but not true of their followers and imitators. They may easily be confounded one with the other, for the degree in which they possess this power, this afflatus or essence, whatever we may please to call it—if indeed they possess it at all—must of necessity be small, since imitation is inimical to individuality. Talent and genius are two very different things.”

“Do you remember those lines of Owen Meredith’s on this subject,” said Adrienne.

“Genius is master of man,
Genius does what it must, talent does what it can.”

“Yet mere talent is not to be despised,” said Florence. “I suspect clever people are of more service in the world’s work than people of genius.”

“In the every day work of the world, yea, sister mine. We could not get along without them any more than we could get along without a copper and silver currency. After all, that simile is not good, for genius is rarer than gold. Let us say that clever people—people of talent—are the ready-

money people of the world, while genius draws bills upon posterity."

"A commercial idea, worthy of an honourable member who seeks to ingratiate himself upon all occasions with a trading constituency," laughed the Squire. "And now, with the ladies' permission, we will leave you here while we ramble over the old house before luncheon. There will be pleasant shade in the grounds in the afternoon, and Lady Florence will want to sketch my favourite old gable, I am sure."

"I have brought materials on purpose, but now show us the house, and if by chance there should be a haunted room, be sure you point it out to us and make the most of the story, for of all things I delight in ghosts and goblins."

"I am afraid I cannot gratify you in this respect," said the Squire, "for of veritable ghosts of the good old school we have no records in our family, only one or two traditions. You see these two children—twin brother and sister—they were loving and devoted playmates and friends, grew up together, learning of the same teacher, and out

of the same book ; for Percy Harcourt, family tradition says, would neither learn nor play without his sister Adela. Thus stimulated by her, he became a scholar, while she, sharing in return in his amusements and pursuits, grew renowned for her skill in horsemanship and woodcraft. In one of these excursions report says that Percy dared Adela to a venturesome leap, himself leading the way. The brave girl followed, and whether through her own or her horse's fault, will never be known, but the animal fell short of the opposite side of the ravine, and plunged head foremost to the bottom, breaking his own and his rider's neck. Percy, as one may well imagine, almost lost his senses, and roamed the country like a perturbed spirit. As the months went on, and his gloom seemed to strengthen and deepen, fears for his reason were seriously entertained, and as the anniversary of the terrible accident approached, it was thought necessary to watch his movements. He had taken to haunting the scene of the sad accident, and it was feared that in a moment of desperation he might end his own days by a plunge into the ravine. The night

before the anniversary of her death he had retired to his room ill and gloomy, and the family, alarmed and disquieted, had instructed a servant to watch in the corridor which led to his apartments. The man had not long been at his post when he saw a grey luminous figure, with flowing drapery, of cloud-like appearance, glide, as it seemed, from the apartments of the dead Adela to those of her twin brother. Alarmed and dismayed, the man stood for some moments, rooted to the spot, then fled through the corridor, shrieking wildly for assistance. Family and servants rushed to the rescue, fearing some outbreak on the part of Percy, but all they could elicit from the terrified man was—"She is there—there—with him now." A heavy fall in Percy's room startled them still further, and without waiting to hear more, his father and mother burst open the door. Their son lay on the ground, the moon streaming full in at the open casement, and gliding as it were up its beams they saw the luminous cloud-like form of their dead daughter, as she turned full upon them a beaming seraphic countenance, expressive of rapt tenderness and peace.

"Percy had swooned, and it was some time before his senses returned, but as he became conscious, and saw his mother leaning over him, he whispered, in a calm, happy tone—

"'I have seen her, mother, seen Adela—it is well with her, she is happy — blessed beyond all we can imagine ; and by this day year I shall have rejoined her.' He rose the next morning a changed man. Calm and happy, he returned to his ordinary pursuits. Time glided peacefully on. Adela's reappearance was often the subject of conversation. None of the four who had seen her doubted its reality, but the father and mother strove to combat in their own minds and that of Percy the idea of his death before the expiration of the year, but in vain. I cannot remember the precise time, but before the second anniversary of the fatal accident, Percy was no more. Like Adela's, his death was sudden, but not violent. He was found dead in his bed, with a sweet, placid expression on his face."

"Well, if that is not a *bona fide* ghost story," said Lord Charles, "it is a very near relation—a first cousin, at the least."

"And will you show us the rooms?" said Adrienne.

"I am afraid I cannot even do that, at least with any certainty; for we are not a superstitious race, and what I have just told you was looked on so entirely as a fact by the persons immediately concerned, and has been so handed down from generation to generation, that it is only to strangers it bears a supernatural character, and beyond a guess, I do not think anyone living could tell which rooms are supposed to have been the scene of these incidents. But come, ladies, the day is getting on, and my old housekeeper has been waiting some time to show us the upstairs rooms. We will ask her if she knows which were Adela and Percy Harcourt's, but I doubt it."

If the outside of the old house was picturesque, the inside was thoroughly home-like and comfortable—modernised to a great extent and with considerable taste and skill. During the long minority of the young Squire, the furniture and upholstery had become obsolete, rendering renovation necessary; and he had prudently entrusted this operation to a first-rate London firm—interfering but little

in what he was wise enough to know he knew nothing about.

“I want whatever is done to be in keeping with the house itself. Give me good colours—purple, crimson, and green, and rich materials; and remember that I hate ornament and trumpery, and want everything solid and handsome.”

Upon these general directions the details had been carried out with a very satisfactory result.

A quantity of fine old carved oak—heirlooms, in the shape of chests, cabinets, sideboards, &c., was distributed all over the house, and the rich colouring of the furniture and drapery in the principal rooms, the flooring of which was also of oak, harmonized admirably with it.

It was easy to trace the refining effect of the Squire's continental travel—busts, casts, models, were everywhere to be seen, while his own room was rich in foreign reminiscences—marbles and mosaics from Italy and Greece, guns, swords, pistols, and weapons of all countries and shapes, from the fine-tempered Damascus blade to the rough tomahawk of

the New Zealander, decorated its tables and walls—a perfect museum of curiosities, which had not yet found their permanent places.

This room was a great delight to Adrienne, who had seen nothing like it before, and later in the day, when Lady Florence was busy with a sketch of the old gable which crowned one end of the wing in which this room was situated, she asked the Squire's permission to return to it and amuse herself with its treasures. Lord Charles, having avowed himself crippled and cross, had taken up his place in an easy chair under the shade of a fine cedar, whence, when tired of book and cigar, he could either rejoin the others or call them to him as he lay there—for the whole party were within sight and hail.

“May I deposit myself somewhere about here, Lady Florence?” asked the Squire.

“Yes, anywhere, so that you do not get behind me where you can watch me drawing—it makes me nervous to know anyone is looking at every stroke of my pencil—takes all my pleasure away.”

“Heaven forbid that I should ever do anything but minister to your pleasure,” said the

Squire, throwing himself down with his face fronting the lady — an admirable position for watching her countenance and busy fingers, without creating any fear that her drawing was being overlooked, more especially as she was seated on a camp stool, while he lay upon the grass.

“You have been an angel of goodness to us all at the Rectory,” she replied; “I do not know what we should have done without you.”

“That cuts two ways,” replied the Squire, good-humouredly. “Had it not been for me, Charles would never have come into these parts, the accident would not have happened, and there would have been no occasion for the poor services you so graciously acknowledge, so that the question arises if it would not have been altogether better had you done without me at all.”

“You are playing with words, Mr. Harcourt, and I am expressing very sincere gratitude for the great kindness you have shown us. Moreover, I believe that what is is best. I have no doubt, though we may not see how and why, that this very accident to my brother

is a link in the chain of destiny, whose fitness we shall hereafter see and acknowledge."

"That which has been the means of my knowing you, Lady Florence, must always be best to me, come what may," said the Squire, with a touch of tenderness in his deep voice, which brought a conscious blush to the lady's face.

"Are you quite sure that is not a rash assertion," she replied quickly, turning to look for some colour of which she was apparently in instant and pressing need.

"Quite sure; sure as I am that though I may never see Italy, and Greece, and Syria again—places I loved with my whole heart until quite lately—I can never feel it other than a privilege to have known and loved them." It was the Squire's turn now to redden and flush at his own words, whose full meaning he did not recognise until they were spoken.

"But places and people are quite different things," said Lady Florence coldly, proceeding with her drawing.

Big, powerful man as he was, a pure heart and a modest soul lodged in that large frame

of the Squire's. He was startled and shocked, both at his own words and the effect they had produced.

"I mean, Lady Florence," he continued awkwardly—"that if we have the eyes to see and the heart and mind to appreciate what is good and noble and beautiful, it is all pure gain to us, though we see it as aliens and strangers, as I saw those fair countries, without any hope or thought of possessing them."

Did the Lady Florence enjoy the simplicity and confusion of the stalwart Squire, playing with her victim as an angler plays with his prize before he lands it, or was she indeed displeased at the turn the conversation had taken, and desired to end it? Be this as it may, she returned no answer to the Squire's last words, but apparently absorbed in her occupation, had eyes and ears for nothing else.

The silence was embarrassing; at least so the Squire felt it, and therefore he broke it.

"So this is the last day we shall all have together. Charles says he must positively go to London to-morrow. He wants me to join him in a few weeks, at the height of the

season, but I have plenty to do here, and perhaps I shall go abroad again this winter; if so, I shall not have too much time to do it in."

"Returning to those fair countries whose beauties and delights you speak of so disinterestedly, but without which you evidently cannot be long satisfied?" asked Florence archly, but with feeling in her tone.

The Squire looked up in the lady's face, and whether he read there something which he had not seen before, or, reckless and desperate, ceased to weigh his words, he said impetuously—

"Places and people are quite different things, as you say, Lady Florence. The one can wound us; the other cannot. I have known more pain in the last five minutes than I ever knew in all my life before."

"You have been a very lucky fellow then," she interrupted, but with a caress in the smile which disarmed the words and the Squire.

"You are playing with me, Florence," he exclaimed passionately.

"We women are given to play with our happiness, at least it is said so," she replied.

"But do not play with mine, I entreat you," urged the Squire. "You know that I love you, love you with all my heart and soul, Florence—love you as you deserve to be loved."

"Are you sure of that?" she broke in vehemently; "sure that you or any other man can love a true whole-hearted woman as she deserves to be loved? To how many women have you said this before?"

"To none, Florence, as Heaven is my witness; my heart is pure and virgin as your own, not the shadow of a passing fancy even has crossed it! I never knew what love was until I knew you, and whether you accept or reject me, I shall never know love again."

"Tell me this a year hence, and I will believe you," said Florence, in a voice of deep emotion.

"And meanwhile?" said the poor Squire, meekly and humbly.

"I will love you as you love me, neither more nor less;" and as she sat there bending, to all appearance, over her drawing, and the Squire lay motionless at her feet, those true pure hearts communed voicelessly, their eyes

met in a long chaste kiss, for as Frederica Bremer says—"eyes as well as lips can kiss," and without further word of love or pledge, each knew that the other would be faithful unto death, and after.

Meantime Lord Charles, speedily tired of his cigar or his solitude, had no sooner seen the Squire comfortably placed at his sister's feet, than a sudden longing took possession of him to share Adrienne's studies among the Squire's treasures of art. The restraint he had put upon his feelings was to-day more galling and irksome than ever. The passionate outburst of the day before, subdued and controlled as it was, had made the continued restraint more difficult. To a certain extent it had opened the eyes of Adrienne herself, and as he saw this in the timid glance which until now had been so frank and free, in the shy and half-unconscious avoidance of him, he felt irresistibly urged to regain her confidence, to place her upon the old easy footing, to make things as they were before, as the best and safest for all concerned.

Alas for the irreparableness of human actions: not all the blood of all the martyrs,

from the creation of the universe downwards, not all the tears of all the saints and sinners the world has ever held, not even the Almighty himself, can wash out or annihilate the past! Our smallest, as our greatest deed, once done, is done for ever and ever! Well indeed has it been said that half the life of man is spent in expiation and atonement for the other half. Expiation and atonement—yes! God be thanked that in the face of the irrevocable past these are ours; that we can, if we will, atone for and expiate our sins against God, others, and ourselves.

Lord Charles found Adrienne not as he would have expected, had he given it a thought, immersed in the curiosities around her, but ensconced in an easy chair, buried in thought, sad and pensive.

She did not hear his foot-fall on the thick Turkey carpet as he entered by a window open to the ground. He laid his hand gently on the golden head, and Adrienne, without looking up, pressed fondly against it.

"It is not Florence," he said quietly, and Adrienne started to her feet, glowing with surprise and shame.

"Why so startled? I know you thought it was Florence. Is Florence's brother so alarming a person that you should shrink from his touch, Miss Hope?"

"No, no, indeed," she replied, smiling at her own confusion; "but I was buried in thought, deep in day-dreams and regrets."

"And you wish it had been Florence, that she might listen to them and console you, as I cannot?"

"She would understand me better, of course," said Adrienne. "You would think my regrets foolish—"

"Not if she and I have a part in them?"

"You know you have," said Adrienne ingenuously, "how could it be otherwise? Think for a moment what I shall lose to-morrow, when you are both gone. If it were not for poor Papa and my duties in the village I could not bear it."

"My poor child, you will indeed be sad and lonely, yet you were very happy and contented before you knew us?"

"I was saying so to myself when you came in," said Adrienne, "yet all my past life, seen in the light of the last three months, seems

pale and poor. I wonder now how I lived through it, and thought it so happy and perfect."

"You will feel it so again after a little while," said Lord Charles tenderly and gently, really wishing to reconcile the poor girl to a fate which he could not but feel was lonely and trying.

"Never," exclaimed Adrienne, with a sudden burst of passion. "I was a child then; I am a woman now. Everything seems changed to me—myself more than all else," and flinging herself down on a sofa which stood near, she buried her face in the cushions, and sobbed.

"Adrienne, dear Adrienne," said Lord Charles, moved by this outburst, and for the moment feeling only tender compassion for the young creature before him, "be calm—be consoled. I know it will try you to part with us, and we shall grieve, too, but you will come and see us in the autumn, and who knows," he continued—forgetting, in his desire to console, how he had deprecated this very idea the day before—"who knows," he said tenderly, trying to get possession of her hand, "but

Flory's wish may come to pass, and we may be close neighbours for long years to come."

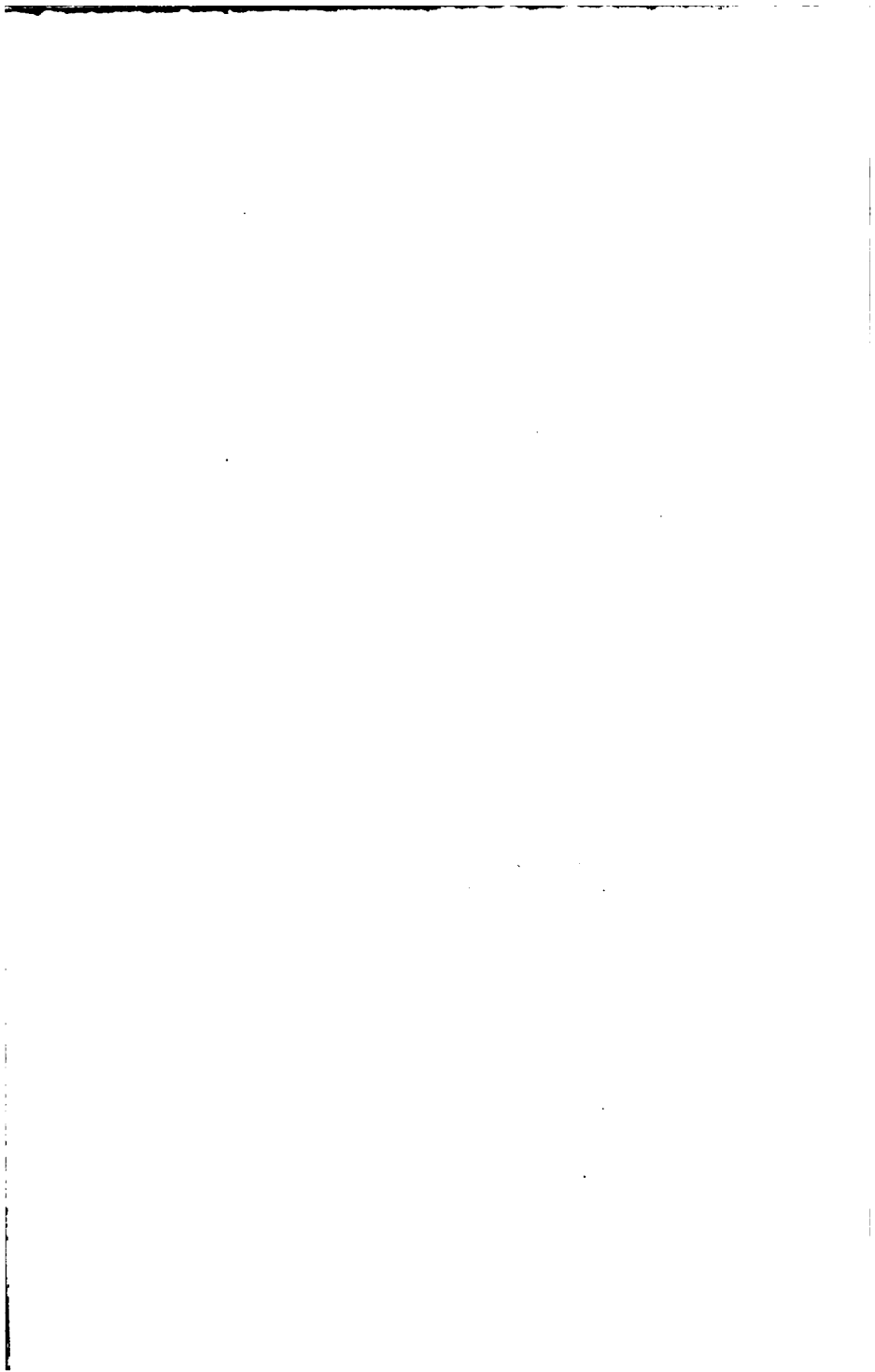
"Oh, that it might be so," exclaimed Adrienne fervently, raising her face, glowing with mingled sorrow and hope, and surrendering her hand to Lord Charles. "I could bear to lose you now if I did not think it was for ever."

Lord Charles was no coxcomb—sweet as these words were, he knew they referred to his sister as well as to himself—that the innocent young girl spoke in artless faith and simplicity; but though he knew this the words lingered and echoed in the chambers of his heart with dangerous fascination.

The clasped hand, the close proximity, the very artlessness with which Adrienne abandoned herself to her regrets, all fed the passion in his young veins, which would have made him then and there seek her as his wife; but that, powerful as his love and passion were, pride and ambition were stronger within him. The country rector's daughter was no match for Charles Luttrell, and even in the very thick and glow of passion this thought ruled and obtained. But youth and love are hard

of conquest; nature said to the young man—here is your mate—your wife—take her and be happy; but pride and ambition whispered—you cannot afford it, you must refrain, or your career in life is cut short—your prospects ruined and blasted.

And so, thrusting from him the natural temptation which cried aloud, and heeding the low deep whisper—for Charles Luttrell had an iron will, and could conquer even himself when he chose—he folded the young girl in what he intended should pass for a brotherly embrace, covered the fair young brow and head as he drew it to his breast with impassioned kisses, and whispering to her to be of good cheer, to trust to him and Florence, that they should not be long parted, he tore himself away from the dangerous scene, which, whatever the result upon himself, rent the last veil from Adrienne's eyes, and left her, from the girl he had found her, not only a woman, as she had said, but a loving passionate woman, believing herself equally beloved, and ready thenceforth to live or die at another's bidding.



BOOK SECOND.

“ We paled with love, we shook with love,
We kissed so close we could not vow ;
Till Guilio whispered, ‘ Sweet, above
God’s Ever guarantees this now.’ ”

BIANCA AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES.

BOOK SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE Luttrells were gone, and Adrienne was alone with her father and Peggy. The first few days she felt like one in a dream, and wandered from room to room, or sat of an evening by the hour together, with folded hands and listless countenance, in the bay window so lately occupied by Lord Charles and his sister, living over again the happy hours she had known with them, and striving in vain to reconcile the remembrance of what she had been with what she was. An age of thought and feeling, a deep impassable gulf, lay between the past, in which she had

not known them, and the three months of intimate companionship which had opened a new world to her, and given her the first friend of her own sex, and something dearer still in that friend's brother.

But Adrienne was no idle dreamer, and though the evenings found her thus dwelling and pondering on what was at once so sweet and bitter, the duties of the day, both at home and abroad, were, if anything, discharged with more scrupulous care and hearty good will.

Her own deepened feeling imparted a certain tenderness to her manner, and quickened her sympathy with all about her. Both her father and the village goodys were sensible of a change—sensible that the kindly girl had passed into thoughtful womanhood, and the vicar's looks dwelt with mingled pride and fondness on the noble countenance of his daughter whose love and care were a second providence to himself, giving to his passive, student nature, just the rest and support it needed.

Lady Florence and her brother sought in different ways to soften the parting and cheer

her loneliness. From the former Adrienne received long and affectionate letters, telling her of that busy London life of pleasure—of concerts, and operas, and pictures—that happy blending of art and dissipation which constitutes the London season, and which to Adrienne came with all the charm of a fairy tale. While from the latter, parcels of books and music, and newspapers told of remembrance and suggested readings and studies which should fit her for the renewed companionship to which she looked forward in the autumn. For a visit to Park Hall was a settled thing. Lady Florence having taken care to procure Mr. Hope's assent before leaving.

The Squire had ridden over two or three times during the first few weeks to look after Adrienne, he said; but as Adrienne shrewdly suspected, in the hope of being made a partaker of whatever news she had herself received from Lady Florence, and might choose to impart. The two seemed never to tire of discussing their friends and forming plans for the future.

Florence Luttrell, as the reader has probably gathered for himself before this, was a

young lady of very decided opinions, and she would herself probably have added, of considerable experience and knowledge of the world. She had lived much in society, and a great deal with men, and though as she had said to Adrienne, her most constant companion, her brother Edward, was himself as pure and gentle and single-minded as any young girl, this was not the case either with her brother Charles or the young men who, as his and Edward's friends, frequented the house. Florence was herself a shrewd observer, and one chief pleasure of Edward's life was observation and study of character. Between the two, there were not many of their visitors who escaped the scalpel eyes either of brother or sister, and this habit of observation and subsequent discussion had certainly given both an unusual insight into character.

Like all women who have lived much with men, and who are not ingrained coquettes, there was a firmness and decision in Florence's manner, and a practical mode of viewing things, which, combined with natural shrewdness and vigour of mind, gave her an ascend-

ancy over men and women of her own standing who were brought into contact with her, and made her at all times, as her brother Charles would have said, quite capable of holding her own.

With all her cleverness, charm of manner, and fine personal appearance, she was not a woman generally attractive to men, and for this reason—she was superior to the usual run of men, and a man of ordinary calibre never forgives superiority in a woman. She knew her own worth and theirs, and was therefore not likely to throw herself away on the first fool who, tempted by the advantages of the connection, and his own fatuitous belief that he had but to propose to any woman living to be accepted, might have condescended to ask her hand in marriage.

A true woman, nothing short of a true man could win her. Her whole being responded to the honest faithful nature of Squire Harcourt, and though it pleased her to put that honesty and fidelity to the test, her faith in him was as deep and loyal as his faith in her.

One year from that golden afternoon at

Harcourt Hall, she had bid him wait, and urge as he might an abridgement, the Squire would have found it useless. It was perhaps the knowledge of this which made him bow uncomplainingly to her verdict. He was not to be banished from her presence, he was at liberty to avail himself of every reasonable opportunity of seeing her ; but neither to her nor her belongings, was he to over-step the bounds of friendship, and appear in the character of a suitor.

The Squire was also an invited guest to Park Hall for the autumn, and he had promised Lord Charles to spend a few days in town with him before the season was over. Meanwhile, he busied himself with setting his affairs in order, and receiving from his guardians the lengthened accounts of the long minority. A prosperous young Squire he was, and thanks to the faithful stewardship of an originally unincumbered estate, he found himself at twenty-five the happy proprietor of a thriving tenantry, and a rent-roll which might have satisfied the desires of a greedy and grasping man, and which more than exceeded his wants and wishes.

Lord Charles had said truly that a handsome young Squire of good family and unincumbered estates might pick and choose where he pleased, and no fear of difficulty with Lady Florence's family for a moment clouded the brightness of the future.

Thus the summer passed with the friends left behind. The Squire's visit to London was apparently all that he could have wished, for on his return home he gave Adrienne a glowing account of morning rides and drives with Florence and her brothers, of balls, and concerts, and operas, through which it was easy to detect the personal happiness and content of a lover, a fact which set Adrienne wondering upon the relationship between the two, and why, with everything so smooth before them, there should evidently be some hitch, some impediment, which yet could not be of a serious nature, since both seemed perfectly happy and content. The Squire returned laden with books and music for Adrienne, and told her how Lord Charles was quite himself again, and more eager than ever in his parliamentary duties, with which he suffered nothing to interfere.

“You would scarcely know him in his London life, having only seen him as an invalid here,” said the Squire. “He is a most active, industrious fellow, and works as hard at committees as though his bread depended upon it. There is scarcely a society of any note of which he is not a member, and an active member too. He seems to live only for a public career, while his brother Edward, on the contrary, poor fellow, is almost entirely confined to the sofa, and leads the life of a book-worm and diletante. He is a nice fellow too—tender and generous-hearted—and throws himself with ardour into the fine arts. He says it is a pity he has not to get his living by literature, that he should make a first-rate critic under the spur of necessity—and I believe he would. He is passionately fond of music, it appears, goes constantly to the opera, to listen more than to see, though his father and sister have had a reclining seat arranged for him which enables him both to see and hear if he pleases. He bid me tell you that he was looking forward with great pleasure to your visit to Park Hall, as he was sure you would indulge

a poor cripple with as much music as he wished."

"Is he lame?"

"No, not exactly lame—it is some weakness of the spine from which he suffers, so that he cannot walk or stand without difficulty. His general health seems pretty good—he is always cheerful and happy. He and Lady Florence are devoted to each other. I don't know what he would do without her."

"Yet he got on well enough all those weeks she was here."

"He does not think so," replied the Squire, "and says he will never part with her for so long again."

"What will he do if she marries?" asked Adrienne.

"Oh!" continued the Squire, reddening, "he says that whoever marries Florence will have to marry him too, and so I suppose it will be, unless, indeed, he should himself marry, and I do not see why he should not."

"Is he like his brother or sister?"

"More like his sister than his brother, he has the same dark hair and pale com-

plexion, only he looks an invalid, you know, and Lady Florence—”

“Is as fresh and rosy as the dawn,” broke in Adrienne. “I always think of her with the morning hours and the dew, and all that is freshest and brightest in nature. She is a lovely creature, and good as she is lovely. I do not wonder her brother says he will never part with her.”

“You should see her on horseback,” said the Squire, “it is a perfect picture; she rides beautifully—sits so square and firm, yet is as light and elastic in her saddle as are the limbs of the fine young animal she rides. She has a perfect bridle hand, too—light and steady. Not a showy rider, like most of the ladies one sees in Rotten Row—but anyone who knows what good horsemanship is would pick her out at once from all the rest. I should like to see her following the hounds here—she would take our gates and hedges like a bird.”

“But you must never let her stir from your side, Squire,” exclaimed Adrienne. “Only think if our beautiful Florence, like her

brother, were to be caught in the strangers' trap."

"God forbid," said the Squire, with so hearty an emphasis that both he and Adrienne could not help smiling at themselves, and the picture they had conjured up.

"You will see her ride at Park Hall," he continued, "it is one of her favourite amusements. We are to have pic-nics and all sorts of pleasant things. I assure you the Luttrells look forward to the visit—almost as much as we do, Miss Hope."

"That cannot be—at least, so far as I am concerned," said Adrienne. "All their life is fairy-land to me—I hear of it and think of it—as I used to do of the Arabian Nights—and it seems quite another life to what I have hitherto known."

"You will take to it very naturally when once you are in it," said the Squire, kindly. "And now, good-bye, for I have over-stayed my time, and taken up too much of yours."

And so saying, he mounted his horse, and, whistling to Lion—who, as usual, was deep in the mysteries of the kitchen with his friend Peggy—rode off to the beautiful home which

he loved more than ever—seen in the light of his new hope, and to which he looked ere long to bring his bride.

Love and Hope are the golden age of the young—Patience and Resignation of the aged.

CHAPTER II.

PARK HALL, the residence of the Marquis of —, was a fine old Tudor mansion, in the heart of a county adjacent to Middlesex, and some thirty or forty miles from the metropolis. A princely residence, its former owners had entertained royalty itself beneath its roof. In the great drawing-room and oak gallery, Queen Elizabeth, while their guest, had held her court, and Henry the Eighth was said to have slept one night under its shelter.

Built on a square, the oak gallery ran from end to end of the pure Tudor front; and in the centre beneath was the arched entrance to the quadrangle, while directly facing this

arch, on the other side of the quadrangle, was the principal entrance to the Hall.

This Tudor front, with its small casement windows and vast surface of wall, lay to the west, and with the north and east fronts, was but little modernised, while the south, which faced into the open park, and to a large lake beyond, had been considerably altered, and, to modern notions, improved. In this south front were the principal living-rooms of the family. The boudoir of the mistress, the library, the dining-room and the billiard room, all en suite, occupying the ground floor, while over it, towards the centre, were the family drawing and ante-room, with bedrooms beyond. The east front was chiefly occupied by a large and lofty summer dining-room and hall, with marble pavement and panelled walls. This hall was lighted by large massive windows, with small panes, on either side of the heavy double doors which opened into the stately terraced garden, and beyond was a quaint smoking-room, its ceiling upheld by a row of columns. Queen Elizabeth's drawing and ante-room, with a small room beyond, which, in Catholic times, had been

used as a sort of private chapel, and had a confessional in its walls, occupied the second story of the north wing, while below it were numerous small rooms and a small square hall, whence a second inferior oak stair-case led immediately to the great drawing-room.

The principal stair-case was in the centre of the great Hall, and branched off at its base, on one side to the south wing, on the other to the principal entrance in the quadrangle.

Nests of bed and dressing-rooms, shut into passages by themselves, occupied the corners of the south and east fronts, and also of the north and east, the lofty dining-hall occupying the centre. Over these rooms again were rooms innumerable; bachelors' and servants' rooms, and long corridors, and ghostly garrets and corners, with an access to the roof, whence a fine view of the surrounding country was to be seen.

A noble old mansion it was, and the improvements and alterations which had been necessary to render it suitable for modern occupation had been happily carried out, so as to interfere as little as possible with the character of the place. The tapestried hang-

ings of Queen Elizabeth's drawing-room had long disappeared, and were now replaced by panels of polished oak, relieved with gold mouldings. Huge mirrors let into the walls at either end of the long room, reflected the massive furniture and glass chandeliers, the vases and statues, till it looked more like a gallery in the Louvre or Tuileries, than the state drawing-room of an English house.

The windows of this drawing-room looked upon a velvet lawn, bounded by shrubs and trees, and adorned with stately cedars, a cool nook in the hottest summer day, and where peacocks and silver pheasants delighted to shelter.

Except in summer or when the house was filled with company, this room was little used. The Marquis had taken the ladies' boudoir for his private room, and had surrendered the library to his eldest son and daughter, and here their mornings were usually passed—the evenings in the south-drawing-room, a handsome but cosy room, and better suited to family use.

That library was a charming room, long and low, with a door-window thrown out in

the centre, opening upon a broad terrace walk, with a lawn below, where a fountain cooled the air, while the park and lake lay beyond, with noble groups of trees—oaks and pines—scattered here and there. Walls, ceiling, floor—all were of oak, at least so much of the walls as could be seen, for the carved book shelves, with their hundreds of volumes, lined three sides of the room, their gay bindings and gildings lighting it up.

Easy chairs and couches, every appliance for comfort that heart could desire, were there to be found, and when Lady Florence and her brother were occupying the room, and his books and her paintings littered the tables, and newspapers and magazines in profusion lay scattered about, and the writing-table told of use—cultivated eyes and minds could have found no fairer sight of the kind. Double doors shut off this room from the Marquis's study on the one hand and the dining-room on the other, and no sound broke upon the stillness but the lowing of cattle or the buzz and hum of insect life in the hot days of summer; while in winter months, when close shut in, with its thick walls and

southern aspect, it was as warm and snug a sanctum as could be found in all England.

Towards the end of September Adrienne Hope arrived. The Squire had escorted her to London, and had seen her safe in the train which was to deposit her at —, where Lady Florence was to meet her. He himself, detained in town by business, would follow in a few days.

Adrienne was not sorry at the prospect of having her friend to herself for those few days, for though no word had passed the lips either of Florence or the Squire, she felt sure that an understanding existed between them, and that at all events she should get more of her friend's undivided thoughts and attention if the Squire were absent. Many vague hopes and fears mingled in Adrienne's mind concerning this longed-for visit. Young and wholly inexperienced, she knew not what meaning to attach to the sudden bursts of feeling which Lord Charles had evinced, and which, stirring in her own innocent heart the latent pity and tenderness his imminent danger and long suffering had naturally inspired, had developed that tenderness into a perma-

ment feeling, which clung round the image of the first cultivated young man she had ever intimately known, and which, nursed in doubts and fears, had gathered strength from this very uncertainty.

During all this absence he had written her no line, but among the many books he had sent her were some in which her name was written—"from C. L.," and these chiefly books of poetry—Tennyson, Longfellow, &c., and contained marked passages, some of which it was scarcely possible the young girl should fail to apply to herself and him.

It was a misfortune that Adrienne's dearest friend was his sister, and that she was thus prevented from seeking the guidance and advice of one older and more experienced than herself. But so it was, and apart from the unqualified pleasure with which she looked forward to being again with Florence, and to making the acquaintance of her elder brother, perhaps even more of fear than hope mingled with the expectation of that other meeting which she could not but feel to have so important a bearing on her happiness.

Lord Charles was not at Park Hall, she

knew, would not be there just at present, for he had gone to the Highlands, to a Mr. Macdonald's, for grouse-shooting, and Lady Florence had told her that his return from that visit was always uncertain. It was a relief to her rather than otherwise, now the meeting was so near, that it should be postponed for a time.

Mr. Hope, that his daughter might feel free and happy in her stay at Park Hall, had invited one of his married daughters and her children to stay with him until Adrienne's return, and Lady Florence had pleaded so hard for a long visit, that Adrienne could count days and even weeks with impunity. She felt sure he would return before she left, and meanwhile she should get to feel at ease in his home, and among surroundings so different to what she had been accustomed.

Adrienne had yet to learn that nowhere is there so much ease as among high and well-bred people. It is only in the houses of the under-bred and parvenus that form and ceremony prevail. Ladies and gentlemen, no matter to what rank of life they belong, are at their ease everywhere; and though these

may be, and not unfrequently are, found among even the social low classes, there are certainly more of them in the higher and educated, whose best specimens are as perfect in their way as are the specimens of roués and blackguards derived from the same source.

Lady Florence and Lord Horton met Adrienne at the station. Florence was on the platform to welcome her young friend, whom she hurried into the carriage, saying—

“Let us get away from these people as fast as we can, there will be time enough for greeting afterwards; the servant will see to your luggage, so come with me, Adrienne. Edward is longing to see you.”

“Now, Edward, here is our Adrienne at last, make room for her by your side,” said Florence, as they reached the carriage, “for you are to be friends at once; take each other upon trust for my sake; though I suspect,” she added, as they drove off, “that, thanks to me, you know more of each other already than a mere acquaintanceship of years would bring about.”

“That is,” said her brother, “if we are

content to see with your eyes and judge with your judgment, Flory. Of one thing I am sure, that if you have spoken of your brother with half the enthusiasm you have spoken of your friend, we ought to be entertaining a high regard for each other at this moment."

"And so you are," said Florence, "of course. But Adrienne is tired, the dear little rustic; she has never been such a long journey or so far from home before. And how did you leave Mr. Hope, and Peggy, and the Squire."

"The two first quite well; the Squire has only just left me," said Adrienne, "as I think you know."

"Oh, yes, by-the-bye, he was to escort you to town I remember," replied Florence, with that feminine deceit which so often assumes indifference to what is nearest and dearest.

Adrienne was puzzled for a moment, and looked inquiring at her friend.

"We must make the most of the few days we shall have alone," Florence continued, "for we shall have a house full of people afterwards, and Charles is sure to bring some men down with him for partridge shooting.

He will be very vexed to be away now you are come, dear."

"I am so glad to come amongst you while you are alone," said Adrienne timidly to Lord Horton. "What Florence says is quite true, I have never been from home before, and everything is new and strange to me."

As some time after they drove in at the lodge gates, Florence said to Adrienne—

"Now you will see a more perfect specimen of Tudor architecture than Harcourt Hall, with its queer wings and grotesque excrescences; but it is a lovely old place, spite of its incongruities, and I often think of our happy day there."

If Florence had been called upon to say how often, and could by any possibility have been induced to confess, we fancy not many days of the weeks which had elapsed since, or even hours of those days could have pleaded innocence of the remembrance, unless, indeed, during the interval of the Squire's visit to London. The living presence is the only antidote to such memories.

The drive through the park to Park Hall was very different to the noble avenue which led up to Harcourt Hall. A wide expanse of grass lay on either side, dotted here and there with groups of fine trees—elms and oaks—somewhat ragged with age, and young plantations of firs and shrubs, while a belt of pines in the distance girdled the park, a break to the left disclosing the venerable grey church and the parsonage. As the carriage rolled on, it passed on the right a thick shrubbery, and a long vista of close-shaven lawn, flanked by oaks, elms, and pines, throwing their broad shadows across the velvet surface, and producing fine effects of chequered light.

“That is a grand place of refuge on a hot summer’s day,” said Florence; “it is full of rooks, and rabbits, and hares, and I have sat there by the hour together, watching the creatures come and go in perfect ignorance of the presence of any living thing but themselves. These are the stables and kennels,” she observed, as they passed a square block of buildings, and she saw Adrienne’s in-

quiring eyes taking in everything which met them. "And now look forward, and tell me what you think of Park Hall itself."

It was indeed a lovely scene which met the young girl's eyes, and fully justified her exclamations of delight and surprise. Away to the right stretched the park, with herds of deer feeding or resting under the shelter of the grand old trees, which on this side grew chiefly in scattered avenues—a solitary oak here and there stretching its mighty arms to the four quarters, while in the front the waters of the lake gleamed in the autumn sunshine, rippled by the autumn breeze, and the white sails of the yachts, rivalling the driven snow, swayed to and fro in the wind. A sudden bend, and the red brick wall of the Tudor front, glowing in the sunset met her eye; the carriage rattled through the porte-cochere, swept round the fern-covered fountain in the centre of the large quadrangle, and drew up at the principal entrance, whose open doors disclosed a marble-paved corridor, and walls covered with pictures.

Adrienne was lost in admiration and de-

light, Florence received her in the hall with a warm kiss of welcome, and carried her off directly to the room prepared for her, near her own, "lest," as she said, "the ghosts of the old house should make free with her visitor."

CHAPTER III.

FOR nearly a week the trio were left to the enjoyment of each other's society, for though the Marquis was at home, save at meal-times and for an hour or two in the evening, he gave them but little of his company.

For the first day or two Adrienne was completely bewildered with the size of the house, and did nothing but lose herself in its long corridors. Edward and Florence were much amused with the naïve astonishment and admiration she expressed. It was quite refreshing, Florence declared, to come upon anything so natural in these artificial days.

Boating was a great amusement with the brother and sister, and several hours of each

day were passed in sailing or rowing on the lake. Lord Edward was thus enabled to get air without fatigue, for both row-boats and yachts being specially arranged with reference to his requirements. One end of the lake was crossed by a rustic bridge, and near this the beautiful white water lily grew in profusion. It was a special delight to Adrienne to watch the boat glide among its broad leaves, bending beneath its pressure to rise again unharmed, and to gather the white cups with their hearts of gold.

What with books and music, boating and driving, the hours flew rapidly by.

Edward delighted in Adrienne's music, and she in her turn was charmed with the patience and gentleness with which he bore his misfortune, and the well-stored mind whose resources were ever at the service of others. They speedily became great friends, and by the time the expected visitors began to arrive Adrienne was as thoroughly at home with the brother as with the sister, and altogether at her ease.

The first guests who arrived were a Lady Morton and a Miss Reay.

"Nice women," Florence said to Adrienne, "both characters in their way, and though they have only known each other of late years, there are some striking points of resemblance between them; you will like them, I think, better than any of the others we are expecting. Lady Morton is the widow of a peer, and Miss Reay a literary woman, who has seen a good deal of the world, and, like her friend, is not very much in love with it I fancy."

These ladies arrived just in time to dress for dinner, and Adrienne did not see them until they assembled in the drawing-room, preparatory to dinner being announced; even then, their arrival had been so late that they only made their appearance at the last moment, and it was not until they were seated at table that she had time to observe them.

Lady Morton sat on the Marquis's right hand and Adrienne next to her, on Lady Florence's left; Miss Reay and Lord Horton opposite; so that she had only a side view of Lady Morton's face for the most part, as she and the Marquis plunged into the politics of the day at once, and belonging to different

parties, carried on the discussion with considerable animation.

But the profile of the lady was so pure and noble that she was struck with it directly; the shaded silver grey of the silken hair, the clear fair complexion, and the long handsome grey eye, made up a countenance singularly and unmistakably beautiful, while the bust and shoulders, still fine, bespoke a figure that in its youth must have been lovely in the extreme. There was strong character in every look and movement of the lady, in her voice no less than in the words she uttered, and in her somewhat large but handsomely-formed hands. The dress of rich silver grey moiré which she wore, with point lace and a few valuable diamonds and opal, became her admirably.

Miss Reay was a tall, slight, clear-skinned brunette, some twenty years younger than her friend, with marked and somewhat heavy, not to say stern features.

She looked ill and suffering, Adrienne thought; but she chatted and laughed with Lord Horton and his sister, and occasionally joined in the conversation between the Marquis and Lady Morton.

After dinner, when the ladies were alone in the drawing-room, Miss Reay, pleading fatigue, ensconced herself in an easy chair, and quietly submitted to the half scolding, half solicitude of her friend, who appealed to Lady Florence to know if it were possible for anyone, especially a woman, to work morning, noon, and night with impunity.

"Yet this is what Miss Reay does," Lady Morton continued, "until she half kills herself. I am quite sure she would accomplish more in fewer hours, if she could only be persuaded to try."

"And if, not being my own mistress, I could by any means manage it," she answered, good-naturedly, but with weariness in her tone. "But you see, Lady Florence, we women who stand alone in the world, and have to work for our own living, must do the work we find ready to our hand. We cannot be choosers. I am engaged just now in work which is, in many respects, uncongenial to me, but as, through the treachery of one I loved and trusted, I suddenly found myself brought face to face with starvation or work of whatever kind I could

get—could I hesitate which to choose? and if I may be over-taxed at times, I live in hope of better things, and meanwhile must be thankful that I am as I am; thankful that I have good friends to cheer me on, even though they do scold and abuse me like this dear Lady Morton here, thankful that the work I have is good work for myself and others, though it may not be what I would have selected could I have chosen.”

Adrienne was at once interested in Miss Reay, and as Lady Morton, baffled in her friendly attack by this reply, turned away to look at some engravings with Lady Florence, she placed a footstool for her feet, and was gliding quietly away, when Miss Reay held out her hand to the young girl, and thanking her for her kind attention, said—

“Sit down by me and talk to me. I am only body tired, and my thoughts will not help to refresh me.”

“Will you tell me what your work is?” asked Adrienne.

“Surely, if you care to know. I am just now engaged in editing a philanthropic journal, with which a great deal of practical

work is connected, the chief burden of which falls upon myself and two or three others. I was broken down in health when I undertook it, and I am over-taxed at times, especially in warm weather. But I quickly recruit; you will see in a few days how the blessed peace and quiet of this dear old place will refresh me."

"And will you tell me," said Adrienne, still more interested, "what work you would choose?"

"I made a fair start in early life in a literary career," returned Miss Reay, "but cruel circumstances intervened," and a heavy shadow passed over the speaker's face; "the best years of my life were utterly and uselessly sacrificed; but it is a long and painful history, my child, and you are far too young and bright to know anything but the happy side of life, so tell me of yourself, and how you pass your days here, and how you like this grand old place."

When Adrienne came to speak of music, Miss Reay eagerly interrupted her.

"You love music; you play?" she cried.

"Oh, you blessed child, will you play to me now—this moment!"

"That I will," said Adrienne, rising, and laughing at her impetuosity, "now and whenever you like. What shall it be or rather—who—name the master."

"Beethoven," said Miss Reay, "he is the most satisfying of all. And now I shall shut my eyes and enjoy. Music is more perfect rest to me than anything else."

Adrienne played and played on till tea was brought, and felt almost overwhelmed with Miss Reay's thanks and Lady Morton's praises. Her playing, at all times striking, had to-night been even better than usual. She felt so sorry for Miss Reay, so anxious to do all she could to soothe and cheer her, that the notes gathered new meaning beneath her fingers, and she played with exquisite expression.

"I shall remember your promise," Miss Reay said to her, as they separated for the night; "such music as that does me good, and it is good for you, child, to know that with your music you can help your fellow-creatures."

CHAPTER IV.

FROM this time guests daily arrived—new faces made their appearance at almost every dinner, a certain afternoon train apparently suiting the convenience of everyone. Last of all came Lord Charles, accompanied by the Squire and two other gentlemen, Lord Harvey and Mr. Graham, the two friends, it may be remembered, who some years later were so taken by surprise at Lord Charles's sudden marriage with the Scotch heiress.

Lord Alfred Harvey and Charles Luttrell were almost the same age; Georgie Graham, the eldest son of a Yorkshire baronet, some two years younger. Like the Squire, both these young men were college friends of Lord Charles; but, unlike the squire, who had

resided abroad for some years, they were old and familiar visitors at the hall, while this was his first introduction.

This party also arrived by the late train, and paid their first respects to the young mistress of the house in the drawing-room just before dinner.

As the latest comer and the greatest stranger, Squire Harcourt took Lady Florence down to dinner. She looked brilliantly well and happy, and as they traversed the long corridor from Queen Elizabeth's drawing-room to the principal staircase, she looked up into a face as happy as her own, and said archly—

“You will please to observe, Mr. Harcourt, that it is as the greatest stranger here you are indebted for the honour of escorting me to dinner, and sitting next to me during that solemn meal. Make the most of it, for that privilege may not be yours to-morrow.”

“I can wish nothing better,” he answered, in a tone and with a look of tenderness which flushed the fair face, and caused the uplifted eyes to fall, though not until he had read there what he best loved to see, “than that

to-morrow and for ever, we should cease, even externally, to be strangers. You have only to speak the word, Lady Florence, and the mistake of to-day can never again occur."

"I have spoken the only word you will get for ever," she answered hastily, "if in word, thought, and deed, you do not keep faith with me."

"Can you not trust me?"

"I do trust you, heart and soul, as I know you trust me," and the clear, honest eyes met again, with all a world of love and faith in them.

Big and burly as he was, that slight, graceful woman ruled every fibre of his stalwart frame. To say that he would have died for her is to say little. It is oftener harder to live than to die for what we love. Were it possible to connect with that pure, frank, loyal nature, disloyalty to herself and to him—sin and its inevitable concomitants, sorrow and suffering—he would have lived to sooth, sustain, and comfort, to win her back to herself, so true and faithful were his love and nature.

There were many claimants for Lord Charles's notice, and, beyond a passing greeting, Adrienne and he exchanged no word until quite late in the evening; when, as usual, her charming talent for music caused her to be in request.

Miss Reay was not the only one among that assembly of men and women of the world, who delighted in this naive, artless girl, and her exquisite playing. She was already the pet of the company—sought by its younger members to facilitate their amusements, and by the elder to enliven and cheer what might otherwise have proved dull hours.

Adrienne was too young in the world and the world's ways to look beneath the surface of things, or even to suspect that there were any depths. Guileless herself, thoroughly enjoying everything about her, she could only wonder at the kindness and affection she met with, and exert herself in every possible way to return it.

She was singing a second to some young lady when Lord Charles and his friends returned to the drawing-room; the grand

piano was placed across the opposite end of the room, some considerable distance in itself, and between Adrienne, who was playing the accompaniment, and the entrance door, the young lady with whom she was singing stood. She did not, therefore, observe the arrival, which it must be confessed she had for some time been nervously expecting.

Once or twice during dinner, she had caught Lord Charles's eyes wandering towards her, to be suddenly withdrawn as they encountered her own, and she either saw or fancied she saw that their expression was cold and almost displeased.

Mr. Graham had taken her to dinner, and as he was one of those "curled darlings" who think themselves irresistible to all women under thirty, and who conceive themselves bound in virtue of their own fascinations to bestow all sorts of pretty and unmeaning attentions on their unhappy victims, he had laid himself out to charm and please the golden-haired beauty by his side, and, as he flattered himself, not without success. For Adrienne, to whom all phases of social life were new, and who was utterly unskilled in

the gossip, and fence, and repartee of fashionable conversation, was not only highly amused with her neighbour's quips and oddities, but showed that she was so with the same artless simplicity which distinguished all she did.

The duet ended, some one placed a melody of Schubert's before Adrienne, who proceeded at once to sing it with such simplicity and expression that her audience were enraptured. Georgie Graham was both puppy and coxcomb, and now, when he found that Miss Hope was the centre of an admiring group, he availed himself of the first opportunity which offered to follow up the favourable impression he never doubted he had produced, and to *affiché* himself at once as an adorer of the young lady. With eye-glass in his eye, for he was one of the many young men of the nineteenth century who are afflicted with dim or weak sight, and who, even in our drawing-rooms, and in the midst of our festivities, are always unpleasantly reminding us of the degeneration of the race, he gently pressed his way through the surrounding group, and stationing himself on her left

hand, awaited a favourable moment for tendering his admiration and homage.

Adrienne fairly laughed at his elaborate compliments, and turning suddenly from him, encountered the grave fixed look of Lord Charles, which had so disturbed her at dinner.

Her immediate impulse was to go to him, and ask him, with much of the feeling of a naughty child, what she had done to offend him ; but a second and more womanly impulse restrained her, and even imparted something of indignation to her answering look.

Presently, he advanced towards her, and under cover of a concerted piece which just then began, congratulated her on the *succes de société* she had obviously effected, but with a veiled taunt in the voice which filled her eyes with burning tears of indignation and mortification. No such feeling had ever been excited in Adrienne before. The hot blood rushed to neck and brow ; it was all she could do to maintain her self-control, and as she bit the quivering lip and clenched her hands in the struggle for composure, Lord Charles's

brown eyes watched the progress of her emotion with cold curiosity. They stood the last of a group, still facing the piano, so that except as reflected in the long mirror there was no danger of their being observed.

"You are cruel, unjust," she said at last, in a low tone.

"Or loving and jealous," he whispered, and this time the sudden and burning flush arose from quite a different source, and though, after one rapid glance, the eyes drooped and the lips still quivered, every muscle of the face and figure suddenly relaxed, the sting and the pain were gone.

The music ended, the group broke up, and Adrienne, dizzy and faint, fearing she might be called upon again to sing or play, longing imperatively for solitude, glided quickly through a door close at hand, which led past the ante-room to the oak gallery, whence she could obtain access to her own room.

Lord Charles longed to follow, but he dared not, the words he had spoken had escaped him involuntarily.

"Am I mad," he inwardly exclaimed, "that I suffer this passion thus to master me."

"Do I dream?" was Adrienne's self-question, when faint and breathless, with beating heart and flushed cheek she threw herself into a chair, hid her face in her hands, and listened in the stillness of her room to the echo of the words she had just heard, passionate in themselves, more passionate still in the tones and look which accompanied them.

CHAPTER V.

FOR several days after Adrienne saw very little either of Lord Charles or his friends. An early breakfast was provided for the sportsmen, and, as the preserves lay at some distance from the house, they took what lunch they needed with them, returning only in time for dinner. After dinner the smoking-room and the newspapers offered temptations to weary men which apparently counter-balanced the attractions of the drawing-room and the ladies, for they rarely made their appearance among them, taking their coffee with their cigars, and enjoying all the luxuries of bachelorhood.

"Charles and his friends always live *en garcon* here," Lady Florence said one morn-

ing, in answer to some observation upon the absence of the young men. "This is the true Liberty Hall, whose inmates do as they please, and fortunately there is plenty of room for us all to indulge in our several vagaries without interfering with others. Only Edward and I hang together," she added, leaning affectionately on his shoulder, as he half sat half laid, as usual, on the sofa. "Poor old fellow, he would miss me, as you miss your big dog, Mr. Harcourt; why did you not bring him with you?"

"How could I be sure of a welcome for my dog when I was on new ground myself?" he replied.

"You bewitched Flory among you down there in Devonshire," said Lord Horton. "She has been full of you all ever since, has done nothing but talk about you when she could get me to listen; from Miss Hope to your dog, Harcourt, she painted me your portraits as faithfully as Van Eyck could have done. I should have known you all if I had met you by chance in a railway carriage, I do believe."

"And this is the return you make," said

Florence, blushing, "for my efforts to amuse your solitude, and people it with the pleasant friends I make. You ungrateful creature. And, after all, you told me only the other day that I had entirely failed in describing Adrienne—that she was not at all what I had represented."

"Did I?" her brother replied, himself looking somewhat conscious.

"Now that is so like you men," exclaimed Florence; "when you have not a word to say for yourselves you fall back innocently on the *non mi ricordo* system, and slip through our fingers with 'I don't remember,' or 'perhaps it was so.' You are a provoking set to deal with."

"Did you ever know any human being, male or female, acknowledge him or herself to be in the wrong?" asked Miss Reay, and then, without waiting for an answer, she continued, "I never did. I have known people guilty of the most nefarious conduct, about which there could be no second opinion, except with themselves, and yet nothing on earth, I believe, could have induced them to acknowledge themselves in the wrong."

"There is such a thing as moral blindness," said Lord Horton.

"Yes, and there is such a thing as humbug," continued Miss Reay, "which begins by a wilful deceiving of others and ends in self-deception. I have known some rare instances of this myself. I once knew intimately a person of this description—a woman of strong intellect, of considerable genius in her particular walk of art, which, by-the-bye, is not calculated to strengthen the moral character under any circumstances; I had not known her six weeks, before, to my amazement, I found her maintaining that black was white, to use a metaphor which will best convey my meaning, and maintaining this so strenuously that nine times out of ten I could not avoid the conclusion that she had come to believe it herself."

"I should have let those six weeks close my acquaintance with that person," said Mr. Harcourt.

"I should let six hours close it with any such character now," Miss Reay replied; "but I was inexperienced then. Attracted by her talent and energy, and by some really

fine traits of character, and more especially by an exceeding sweetness and tenderness of manner, which no one knew better how to assume—relying too, somewhat fatuitously on her vehement assertions that circumstances and her profession had produced what shocked and distressed me—and that my influence would help more than anything else to correct it—our friendship continued. But, to return, so vehemently did this woman assert that to be, which it pleased or suited her should be, that I have seen her again and again deceive others and herself, and almost deceive me. She has made me question, in the vehemence of her assertion, the very evidence of my own eyes and senses. I am persuaded now that such people begin by a wilful deception of others, and end by deceiving themselves.”

“I see you share a taste of mine, Miss Reay,” said Lord Horton. “You are a student of character.”

“I always was,” she replied, “and circumstances have strengthened that taste. I have lived a great deal among artists and literary people. As a class, with the exception of

politicians, they represent the highest intelligence of the day, and, as a class, I am inclined to think present more of the peculiar characteristics of the day than any other. They are at the same time more cosmopolitan and more individual, which sounds like a paradox, but you will understand what I mean."

"I saw a good deal of artists and artist life on the continent," said the Squire; "but I cannot say I particularly liked it. Among the younger members there was too much affectation; and, among the older, too much selfishness."

"The *ego* is very large, both with artists and literary people, I confess," replied Miss Reay; "and is apt to take the forms you mention. But I think there has been a great improvement of late years. Art, in any form, is getting to be looked upon as a serious pursuit, not as a romantic vagary, as in times past; and its members are no longer the *rara avis* of society, wondered at and petted, caressed and spoilt."

"Yet we still lionize artists, and actors, and authors," said Lady Florence. "I wonder

sometimes how really superior men and women can allow it."

"It is but another phase of success," Miss Reay continued; "and unpleasant as the admission may be, it is nevertheless a fact, patent to every observer, that personal vanity has a large share in human nature—is the main-spring of many an action. For my own part, I believe the most serious offence that can be offered to man or woman—the one unpardonable sin—is a wound to their self-love."

"And so do I," said Lord Horton; "but vanity is a fairy shield—he who wears it is safe from many a shaft which pierces another through and through. Vanity is the ægis of self-love, as I have read somewhere, that conceit is nature's compensation for ignorance."

"Odious qualities both," said Lady Morton, "and I never will know anyone who possesses either."

"Perfectly natural characters are the rarest things in the world," said Miss Reay, "and are too much at a disadvantage in society to invite imitation."

"Imitation could never be other than a failure," replied Lady Morton, "for the charm of a natural character is its unconsciousness, and the very base and foundation of imitation is consciousness."

"Yet imitation in its highest form is instinctive, unconscious, a natural gift—witness our great actors and actresses. They are not really kings and queens, knights and ladies, yet who lord it so majestically as they," said Georgie Graham, who, with Lord Charles and Lord Harvey, had joined the party.

"And very bad imitations they are, for the most part," chimed in Lord Charles; "except Rachel and Grisi, the modern stage has no queens, and for kings, we may look in vain."

"These are degenerate days for the drama altogether," said Lady Morton. "In my youth the Kembles, Young, and Edmund Kean still held the stage—now there is no one, at least in the highest walks—no great tragedian, either male or female."

"Was it the condition of society which fostered the drama, or the excellence of its followers which influenced society, in the days

of Kean and the Kembles," suggested Lord Horton.

"The one re-acted upon the other, I suspect," said Miss Reay, whom he had addressed. "The court kept early hours, and so consequently did every one else, there were long evenings to beguile, and no cheap editions of books and monster circulating libraries. The theatre was the staple amusement both with court and people. A national institution, as it were, when even the House of Commons could adjourn to witness a *début* of Betterton!"

"And the pronunciation of a word could set the town raving, and furnish paragraphs for newspapers," said Lady Morton.

"*Nous avons changé tout cela*," said Lord Charles, "now it takes a Rachel, a Grisi, or a Mario to move us, and even they must consult our convenience, and fall in with the fashionable late hours. We turn night into day in London during the season, but not here certainly. Flory, do you know we looked for you last night soon after ten, and every one of you had flown."

"Yes," answered Florence, "we were tired

with the day's excursion, and not expecting the honour of your society and that of your friends, which has been even somewhat rarer than usual of late, we betook ourselves early to our rooms."

"Well, we are making up for it to-night you see, Flory, and I am sure if we thought our presence would be considered an addition to the pleasures of the evening, we should be only too flattered and proud."

Adrienne, who had been silently listening to what was going on, had opened a book of engravings when Lord Charles made his appearance. Her heart was sore and troubled, the passionate outburst of a few evenings previous seemed to have thrown them further than ever from each other. She was too guileless, too unworldly, to suspect for a moment the true cause of Lord Charles's avoidance of her society, and she could therefore but attribute to caprice the fluctuations of manner which so pained and distressed her.

Lady Florence had tried to induce her brother and his friends to join the pic-nic of the day before, but in vain. Lord Charles declared that they had promised to meet a

neighbour and his party to shoot over the grounds belonging to both, and that the engagement could not possibly be broken.

Adrienne read in this refusal only a more determined avoidance of all chance of being thrown with her; yet when, in morning or evening salutation, their hands met, the lingering clasp and pressure seemed seeking to detain her; and though he seldom addressed her, his eyes were constantly upon her, watching her every movement, perplexing and embarrassing her.

On this occasion she took refuge in a book which lay near at hand; but as he uttered the last sentence he dropped quietly into the vacant seat on the couch by her side, and asked permission to share her amusement.

The group which had assembled round Lord Horton's sofa broke up, some adjourned to the card-room close by, others to the piano. Mr. Harcourt challenged Lady Florence to a game of chess, and Lord Edward, Lady Morton and Miss Reay continued their conversation on art and artists.

"Did you like that old castle yesterday," said Lord Charles to Adrienne; "at least,

what there is left of it? I think I heard you say at dinner that the moated house close by is more to your taste."

"It is very pretty and picturesque. There is so little left of the castle, save one tower, that there is not much to admire; and that tower is so grey and naked looking, so unclothed with ivy or growth of any kind, that to eyes accustomed to the rich luxuriance of Devonshire it has a cold, bald aspect. Now the house is a perfect greenery—almost smothered in ivy and creepers of various kinds—its casement windows peeping out from the thick foliage."

"You would like the ruins of Kenilworth Castle. I never saw ivy grow anywhere more luxuriantly than it does there. By-the-by, we have some ivy-grown ruins in this county. I must remind Florence of them. It would be a charming excursion, and you ladies seem to patronize pic-nics immensely."

"What is that you are saying?" inquired Lord Horton. "You proposing a pic-nic, Charles, when only yesterday you refused to join one—and thereby offended the ladies not a little."

"I am sure the ladies are very good to be offended at the absence of such a scapegrace," laughed his brother. "But I was not proposing a pic-nic, sage brother of mine. I was only saying that I would suggest to Florence an excursion to Sybil Castle. Miss Hope does not care for such cold grey ruins as she saw yesterday; but she would like Sybil I am sure."

"Very well," joined in Lady Morton; "and now we shall all make it a condition that there are no deserters. You and your friends must first promise to be of the party or we will not hear of it at all. The young ladies were quite at a loss yesterday for attendants, and it is very selfish of you men to think of nothing but pleasing yourselves."

"Upon my word, it is enough to make us young fellows vain to find ourselves in such request," Lord Charles answered.

"Not at all—there are services to be rendered—champagne to be opened—and salads dressed. It is for use not ornament you are wanted," said Lady Morton. "Clubs and club-life have ruined the young men of the present day; they bring their town habits

into the country, and live in their father's houses as though they were at the Carlton or the Reform."

"A very just rebuke, Charles," chimed in Lord Horton. "You are worse than ever this year, and as you know I am necessarily an inefficient representative of the family, I really think you ought—"

"To consider myself less, and others more," said Lord Charles, finishing his brother's sentence, and shrugging his shoulders. "I plead guilty; and now, Lady Morton, having thrown myself upon your mercy, as the representative of all aggrieved ladies, pass on me, I pray, your sentence."

"You shall be adjudged unworthy of our society at all, unless you surrender at discretion, and consent for the next week, at least, to obey the orders of your sister; so come with us at once, and put yourself at her disposal."

Lord Charles rose at this bidding, and with a mock penitent face and manner, offered his arm to escort Lady Morton across the polished and slippery floor.

"Come with us, Miss Hope," Lady Morton

said, "and then when this rebel has made his peace and satisfied our wounded feelings, as a sign of reconciliation you shall play him that Mendelssohn favourite I heard him asking for the other evening, and which I also like very much."

Lady Florence and the Squire were deep in their game of chess—or feeling—and he, as might be expected, was threatened with check-mate.

Florence received her brother's penitence and submission also with an air of mock dignity, and instantly laid her commands upon him for the next day.

Doubtless, if the young man had not been actuated by some foregone conclusion, neither Lady Morton nor his sister would have found him so yielding and obedient. He was not made of pliant stuff, or given to moods of melting. Only in the white heat of passion did his iron nature become malleable.

CHAPTER VI.

THE last few days had been anything but pleasant to Lord Charles. Tormented by the passionate nature of his feelings for Adrienne, and the self-imposed restraint which he considered due to his own position and prospects, daily becoming more and more enamoured, jealous, as he had declared, to such an extent, that he could not bear to witness the attentions of other young men, and so exerted every means in his power to keep them aloof from her, the situation, it must be confessed, was not of the most pleasant.

For some evenings his young friends had proposed adjourning to the drawing-room instead of the smoking-room after dinner, a proposition which he had m e

off; but they became rebellious, and upon the evening in question, after one cigar, declared their intention to seek the ladies. There was nothing left but for Lord Charles to follow their example, and, as we have seen, he at once appropriated the vacant seat by Adrienne's side.

The cold reserve of her manner did not escape his immediate notice, and, as the evening passed on, and his attentions failed to draw her from the distant attitude she had assumed, he became thoroughly wretched and out of humour. With some characters the two conditions are synonymous, and his was one of these.

Georgie Graham fluttered round the piano and Miss Hope, much to his own satisfaction and his friend's annoyance, and Adrienne had been less, or more, than woman, had she failed both to see the annoyance, and to make use of the advantage it gave her. Moreover, Georgie Graham, with his mincing manners and soft insinuations, amused her. She often laughed outright in his face—a merry girl's laugh—laughed at his conceit and folly—but, as he thought, at his wit and amusing

qualities, and so, on good terms with himself and everybody else, he never lost an opportunity of playing the agreeable to her, and was firmly persuaded in his own mind that the rector's daughter was yet another of the many victims who had surrendered at discretion to his invincible charms.

At breakfast next morning, the young men duly made their appearance, according to promise, and the programme for the day was discussed.

October was drawing to a close, and fine days were getting rarer and rarer, while the cool breezes were strengthening, and there was already a sharpness in the morning and evening air which rendered fires at those times acceptable.

The morning was gorgeous, and Lord Charles suggested they should avail themselves of it to visit Sybil Castle, of which they had been speaking the night before—a suggestion unanimously approved of, so that it remained only to arrange the mode of proceeding.

Lady Florence took the lead.

"Lady Morton, you I know will like to ride," she said, "you are of my way of think-

ing, and you shall have Brown Bess—the horse you rode and liked so much the other day. I will ride with you, and now, young ladies, what will you do? Miss Reay will prefer driving, I know, and Adrienne does not ride; the rest of you must say what you wish.”

By far the larger number of the party preferred driving—“the habit was so awkward to get about in, that it destroyed their pleasure,” they said.

“Very well,” said Lady Florence, “then we will have the char-a-banc since you all like that best. Charles will drive you, Miss Reay, and Adrienne, in the pony-chaise. Mr. Harcourt, Lord Harvey, and Mr. Graham will escort us ladies on horseback, and so we may consider it all arranged, and orders shall be given accordingly. We must start as soon as possible, for it is nearly fifteen miles to Sybil Castle, and the days are short.”

No one offered any objection to the arrangements. The equestrians were first started, and when the carriages came to be freighted, Adrienne, laughing and chatting with one of the party near her own age, got with her into

the char-a-banc, in the most unconscious manner in the world, as though she had never heard Lady Florence's disposition of the party, and when challenged by Miss Reay to take the place assigned her, pleaded so earnestly, and was backed by her companion so eagerly in her pleading to be allowed to stay where she was, that there was no resisting.

Lord Charles bit his lip with vexation, and a savage expression passed over his face, but there was no help for it, so he took the seat by Miss Reay's side, and found a vent for his mortification in the free use of his whip to the spirited little animal he was driving, who by no means accustomed to such rough usage, started and plunged at every fresh application, and would have bolted but for the strong arm which restrained it.

Miss Reay was not unobservant of what had passed, or of what was passing now in her companion's mind. Fond of horses, she did not approve of the unjust punishment going on, and said presently,

"You men do not know how to treat high-spirited creatures. Give me the reins, and I will show you that gentleness wins the day

where violence and roughness only arouse opposition."

"Thank you for the lesson—perhaps I need it," replied Lord Charles, good breeding and ill temper struggling for the mastery; "but I am not the man to let a lady drive me—"

"Indeed; from the little opportunity I have had of observing, I should have thought the contrary," Miss Reay drily replied. "You see the pony goes beautifully now you have relaxed rein and whip. It is hardly fair to provoke and restrain at the same moment."

"Yet your sex is given to dealing thus with ours."

"Under provocation, yes; besides, as the weaker vessel, a woman is often obliged to have recourse to stratagem to gain her point, or in self-defence. A man can at all times afford to go straight to the mark—if the mark be an honest and worthy one—and his rights are for the most part so clearly defined that he has nothing to defend."

"By which you mean to say, Miss Reay, that we men have the best of it."

"Certainly, in this world, whatever it may

be in the next," she replied good-naturedly. "Absolute power is not found to be conducive to human worth, and the law of compensation runs through all; so perhaps the balance which is so fearfully against women in this life will be made square hereafter."

"You, and Florence, and Lady Morton seem to me to hold very peculiar opinions on this subject, Miss Reay."

"Not so peculiar as you think: only few women are so situated that they can speak openly and without reserve. Civilization has done a great deal for us, but it has a great deal more to do before our rights shall be equally respected with those of men."

"Perhaps you would like women to be Members of Parliament—law-makers—Miss Reay," said the young man, with a sneer.

"I am quite sure that until women have a voice in framing the laws which particularly affect themselves, they will continue to bear, as they do now, unjustly upon them. The law of master and slave is always oppressive to the latter; and that, with some modification, is still the relative position of man and woman. Until quite lately a married woman

was only a chattel—a piece of goods—as absolutely belonging to her husband as the table he dined from or the coat upon his back. No amount of brutality on his part could free her from the bondage; for an appeal to Parliament was costly, a solemn mockery of justice for all but the wealthy and influential. The new Divorce Court has mended this state of things, and the protection it affords to the earnings of married women is a step in the right direction; but women were chiefly instrumental in obtaining this. You remember the petition signed by thousands and thousands of women all over the country for the introduction of this clause. Depend upon it, as I said at starting, until women have a voice, direct or indirect, in the framing of the laws which concern themselves, they will bear unfairly upon them.”

“ You sympathise then with the American rights of women, Miss Reay ? ”

“ Not altogether ; or perhaps I should say, I sympathise with their general principles, but not with the way in which they try to carry them out. But then they are Americans.

People, who, though of our race, and speaking the same language as ourselves, are as different in character, education, and social training as the Turks themselves. I think it would be a fatal error for Englishwomen to attempt to follow their example in dealing with such a question. The spirit and institutions of the two countries are quite different. Reform with us must always result from the steady growth of the nation. The vanguard of one generation is the rear-guard of the succeeding. With Americans, reform, like everything else, is of mushroom growth. But we have fallen upon a very grave topic, and, unless you care it should be prolonged, suppose we drop it."

Lord Charles made no answer, and Miss Reay settled herself comfortably back in the carriage. She was sorry the young man should have been deprived of younger and more congenial companionship, and did her best to amuse and enliven him during the rest of the drive, with such success that, by the time they reached Sybil Castle, his good humour was quite restored.

The equestrians had been the first to arrive,

and as the char-a-banc drove up, the young men of the party stood ready to assist the ladies to descend and escort them over the castle. Georgie Graham attached himself to Miss Hope, hovered by her side and about her like a butterfly over a rose, proffering his hand or his arm upon every available occasion. But Adrienne was self-helpful, young, strong, and active, accustomed to the free use of her limbs, and by no means inclined to assume the appearance of physical feebleness which has apparently such a charm for many men before marriage, but which we do not remember to have seen cultivated by husbands in their wives after the first few months of union.

Sybil Castle was a charming ruin; one of the strong keeps of the "good old feudal times," as people usually say, though what there was good in tyranny on the one side and serfdom on the other, it might puzzle wiser heads than theirs to define. Barbarous, benighted old fellows were those lords and barons for the most part, holding human life of no value in comparison with the gratification of their wants and whims, while some of

their peculiar privileges were outrages on humanity as gross as any the worst annals of slavery can show.

The party rambled over its grass-grown keep, and climbed its ivy-covered walls and the crumbling steps of the one tower still accessible, while the servants prepared luncheon, and wherever they went, Lady Florence and Mr. Harcourt were still side by side, his strong hand and arm ever ready to aid and sustain, though he did not, like Georgie Graham, and men of his class, hamper and embarrass by constant and wearisome proffers of needless service.

Lord Charles's restored good-humour was sadly taxed by the officiousness of his friend, whom he felt inclined, as they stood side by side on a crumbling wall, to seize by the collar and drop into the vault beneath, and there is no saying to what lengths he might have been tempted, had not Adrienne herself evinced some signs of annoyance at the *petit soins* of which she was the victim.

At luncheon she took refuge between Lady Morton and Miss Reay, who amused them-

selves, and procured a diversion in her favour, by finding constant occupation for the young men in general, and for Georgie Graham in particular. The manœuvre was not lost upon Lord Charles, who performed the duties of the occasion in the most satisfactory manner, contributing by his good humour to the general enjoyment of the company.

Luncheon over, as the party stood in scattered groups, Lord Charles joined Lady Morton, Miss Reay, and Adrienne, and pointing to a thick wood which lay in a hollow about half a mile distant, told them that beyond that wood, which skirted a private park, and within its enclosure, was one of the largest and finest cedars in England—a magnificent tree, which amateurs came a long way to see, and which, if the ladies felt equal to the walk, would well repay a visit.

“Let us go by all means,” said Lady Morton, ever ready to see any beauty of nature, of which she was an ardent lover. “Your sister and Mr. Harcourt will accompany us, I have no doubt. I suppose we must invite the others; but I confess I shall be best pleased if they prefer remaining here.

I hate a number of people about one in these country excursions."

"I hate a number of people at all times," chimed in Miss Reay, "and if I could have my own way no social assembly should ever number more than eight. There is no enjoyment in a heterogenous assemblage of persons, to say nothing of the cross mesmerisms from which I for one suffer horribly."

"What do you mean?" asked Adrienne, wondering.

"I mean," said Miss Reay, "that as trees and mountains, hills and plains, have their different atmospheres, so men and women have theirs—some pleasant and others unpleasant. I am very sensitive to this personal atmosphere, and, before now, have been obliged to change carriages on a long journey by railway, to avoid being made quite ill by the cross mesmerism of a fellow-passenger."

"You mean," said Adrienne, "that your fellow-traveller was dirty, unwashed, —"

"And had been smoking, or eating onions," Lord Charles suggested.

"No, I mean nothing of the kind, you de-

lightful children," Miss Reay answered, laughing at the simplicity of the remark. "And I advise you to read Reichenbach as soon as you can for further information on this subject, though I found out the influence for myself before Reichenbach was known in this country. I can never remember the time when I was not impressed pleasantly or painfully by the people about me, wholly irrespective of who and what they were in their relation to myself, or in their characters."

"How very singular," exclaimed Adrienne. "I can understand the influence of affection, or the contrary—that if we love a person we delight in their simple presence, and that if we dislike, we are equally annoyed."

"I think I know what Miss Reay means," said Lord Charles, "but I suspect women are much more susceptible to these personal influences than men."

"Yes," answered Miss Reay, "their organization is more delicate, their nervous system, poor wretches, more highly strung. But I have known men very sensitive in this respect, too—sensitive, I mean, to the general

atmosphere of people. Of course we are all more or less sensitive to the atmospheres of those we love—that is not what I mean. A curious thing is, that I have known persons, held them in long years of unbroken regard and affection, esteeming, and with good cause, both their characters and lives, and yet their personal atmosphere or mesmerism has at all times been so painful to me, that I could not for long sit by them, or endure the atmosphere of a closed room or carriage with them.”

“You are peculiar in this respect,” said Lady Morton. “You possess this sensitiveness in a higher degree than any one else I ever knew. I have it myself quite sufficiently developed to be troublesome at times—but it would be a very serious matter to society in general if all men and women were sensitives like you. We should have people flying off from each other at a tangent.”

“Or adhering in the most inconvenient manner,” suggested Lord Charles, laughing—“needles round a human magnet.”

“Pricking and wounding it to death,” added Miss Reay bitterly; “such things have hap-

pened before now. But come, if we are to visit this cedar, it is time to be off; and see, while we have been chatting here, the rest of the party has disappeared."

"We must go alone then," said Lady Morton, "for by the time we have found the others it will be too late to go at all."

And so, nothing loth, the four slipped off together.

The path lay down-hill so far as the wood, but that once entered, it became undulating, narrow, and tangled. Lady Morton found her habit embarrassing, and though by no means disposed to turn from difficulties in a general way, they had not proceeded far when she suddenly stopped and declared her intention of going no further.

"I dislike walking in riding attire," she said, "and in a tangled path like this it is quite impossible; so I shall call off and find my way back to the castle while you three go on. We forgot, too, to leave word for your sister where we were going, and she might perhaps be uneasy were she to miss us."

"I will return with you," said Miss Reay, "these young people will get on all the

quicker by themselves ; and to tell the truth, I do not feel up to much walking. As it is, by the time we get back to Park Hall I shall have had quite enough fatigue for one day."

"Let us all give it up," said Adrienne, hastily.

But this proposition was so instantly and unanimously opposed, that she saw it was useless to persist, and made no further effort.

"If we should be late," Lord Charles called to the two ladies, as they were retracing their steps, "tell Florence not to detain the party. You, Miss Reay, will be kind enough to wait, and the pony carriage will take us back."

"All right—you shall be taken care of, so now make the best of your way on," Miss Reay replied, adding to Lady Morton, "if that were the elder instead of the younger son, Adrienne Hope would be his bride before long; as it is, I fear there is trouble in store for him, and a heart-ache for her."

"Never mind him," Lady Morton replied; "an unfortunate attachment—as it is called—never hurts a man. It either glides from

him like water from a duck's back, or it strengthens and improves his character. I should be sorry if that fine young girl were to fix her affections upon him, though—for love will be no passing feeling with her—and he is not the man to sacrifice himself for a woman."

"I suppose it would be a sacrifice," said Miss Reay thoughtfully, "he being what he is; but Adrienne Hope will make a noble woman, or I know nothing of character—a fit mate for a noble man, which I fear this one is not."

"And pray where, my dear, will you find one who is, among the present race of spoiled, selfish young men," Lady Morton returned. "What with indulgence at home and in society, and their luxurious club life, I only wonder they are not even worse than they are. No man under forty is worth anything now-a-days."

"Perhaps men, like wine, if they be good for anything, improve with age," said Miss Reay, laughing, and thus chatting they found their way back to the castle.

Meantime the two they were discussing

proceeded in their search for the cedar. So long as the path still lay through the wood, becoming more and more entangled, Lord Charles had occupation enough in twisting aside the boughs and brambles for Adrienne's passage, and congratulated himself aloud more than once on the determination of the two elder ladies to return.

"Lady Morton would have got into a rage with all these impediments," he said, "and her habit moreover would have been torn to pieces. I am afraid you will not escape with impunity," stooping at the same time to disentangle her dress from a bramble which clutched it with the tenacity of a drowning person, "but we are over the worst now, and nearly out of the wood, and I think we must skirt it as we come back, if you are not afraid of an extra mile."

"Oh no, walking never tires me; I am used to it you know, and after our Devonshire hills the roads of this country are like garden walks."

Once out of the wood, the path lay across some meadows, and thence over a ladder stile into the enclosure of the park. The cedar

was at last reached, and a magnificent tree it was, its large limbs spreading far and wide, some of more ancient growth sustained by props. The ground beneath was carpeted thick and soft with the fallen leaves of years past, and smooth red cones lay scattered about, while the air was fragrant with the rich warm perfume of the cedar.

The tree was of mighty girth, Adrienne tried to span it with her arms. Lord Charles, laughing at her fruitless effort, took one of her extended hands and himself spanning the tree endeavoured to reach the other, but in vain, the tips of their fingers just touched, and all their efforts failed to effect more.

"It is no use, we cannot do it," he exclaimed, still holding the hand he had taken and looking wistfully at Adrienne, who attempted to withdraw her hand, but finding it gently and firmly clasped, looked steadily and proudly into his face.

"Miss Hope, Adrienne, do not look at me thus," the young man exclaimed passionately, "I know you are hurt, offended, and with reason. But, hear me, let me speak to you now, at once! I cannot bear that you should

misunderstand me, think me light and trifling, when I love you with all my heart and soul, and respect you even more than I love you," and with these words he released the hand he had retained, and stood humbly before her.

Adrienne's expressive face had worn a haughty look during the first part of this outburst; she was hurt and offended, and all a woman's dignity rose against the capricious treatment of the past, and what seemed at first like the insult of the present. But, as the young man proceeded, and his fervent words were even more fervently uttered, his whole look and manner bearing evidence to the truth and the intensity of his feeling, the proud questioning passed from her face, her eyes fell beneath the fervour of his, and the flush of anger and indignation faded into a sudden pallor, which alarmed and distressed her companion.

"You are ill—oh, Adrienne—forgive me."

Her limbs trembled under her, she felt faint and dizzy.

Lord Charles timidly approached, longing to put his arm round her, and sustain her,

fearing alike to support or leave her unsupported. They stood thus for a second.

“Adrienne, you love me, or my love could not thus move you. Let me hold you, dearest, sustain and support you, now and for ever.”

And with these words he clasped her to him. Faint and ready to fall, Adrienne yielded to the strong embrace, and buried her face on his shoulder. He bowed his head gently and tenderly on hers, as it lay there, and for a few seconds neither spoke.

The crisis had come—it had proved Adrienne, if a loving, a proud and determined woman, and the young man knew that unless before they parted he could assure her of his own loyalty and faith, she would withdraw from his reach at once and for ever.

“Oh, that I were but the elder brother!” rose to his thoughts and lips, for half unconsciously the words passed them as his head rested on hers, and in the innocence of her heart she murmured, “Why?”

“Why? because then, Adrienne, I could ask you to be mine—my wife, at once. I

could brave family, friends—all—secure in a position of which none could deprive us, while now, I can only tell you that I love you, ask you to love me, and wait for the chances of the future.”

The young girl stirred in his arms and struggled to be free.

“And this is why,” she said, placing a hand on either shoulder, and looking earnestly into his face, “this is why you have sought and shunned me, filling me with fear and doubt and sorrow; oh, Charles, why did you not speak to me frankly from the first?”

“Because I feared to lose you—to lose even the hope of winning you hereafter. Because I tried to master my own feeling, and subdue it to friendship, but I could not.”

“You trusted yourself more than you would trust me,” she said reproachfully, but tenderly, “you have yet to learn what a woman can bear and do for the one she loves and respects. But take me to that seat yonder, and let there be perfect confidence between us.”

Slowly he unclasped his arms, but still supporting her led her to the seat she had indi-

cated. As they sat down, she drew his arm from around her, but surrendered her hand to his seeking. Her frank, blue eyes seemed to question his very soul—if he would he could not have said less than the truth, the whole truth, at that moment.

"Tell me first that you love me," he whispered.

"Should I be here if I did not," she answered with a momentary blush; "but the moments are precious; you have much to tell me. I am ignorant of the world and the world's ways; you shall instruct me."

"I am, as you know," he said, "but a younger son, with my way to make. Perhaps you do not know that we younger sons are expected to uphold the dignity of the family, and to seek in marriage for the wealth and social position, which we can in no other way attain. My father, like other fathers of his class, would never forgive my marrying without wealth or position; he would cut me off without a shilling, and though my mother's fortune is enough for my wants as a bachelor, it would not support the most moderate married establishment. I must carve my way,

make my own position, before I dare to think of marrying where I love, and it is this, Adrienne, which has stood between me and my love for you, and which must yet stand between our love and its fruition. Can you, will you consent to pledge me your faith now, and wait the chances of the future?"

"Does the pledging of that faith imply secrecy?" she asked, the colour rising to her young face.

"Not necessarily; but it will be better that for a time, at all events, we say nothing."

"Not even to Florence?"

"Not even to Florence," he replied, biting his lip, and looking for one moment uncertain. The next his mind was apparently made up, for he said, "Have you no suspicion, have you never observed anything between my sister and Mr. Harcourt, which has led you to believe there is a private understanding between them?"

Adrienne looked up. The matter had not occurred to her in this light.

He continued—

"If she can keep her own secret, why should you not keep yours?"

"But if it be so, it is a whim, a fancy on her part; there can be no real reason."

"And is not a real reason, as you call it, more worthy than a whim?" he suggested.

Adrienne looked thoughtful but made no reply.

"I seek you," Lord Charles continued, "as my wife in the future; surely then I would not ask you to do that in the present which would be, in itself, wrong. You say you are ignorant of the world and the world's ways; trust to my superior knowledge, dearest Adrienne, and let me stand between you and the inexperience which might divide us for ever."

The young girl looked as she felt, troubled and perplexed.

"I see you will not trust me," he continued, in a tone of wounded feeling, "then I will speak to my father at once, and brave the consequences."

"No—no—I entreat—do nothing which can bring trouble and sorrow upon you; least of all could I bear that."

"Then if you love me, as these words seem to say, my dearest, give me your trust, your

faith ; be guided by me, and, oh, be sure that I will guard your honour sacredly as my own."

"I do—I will trust you ; but you must trust me too," she replied, looking tenderly and persuasively into his face. "Let their be no engagement, no secret understanding between us—only the full knowledge that—we love each other—and are content to wait."

"You do love me, Adrienne ? Tell me so, dearest ; let me hear those words once, that the remembrance of them may gladden me in your presence, and strengthen me in your absence."

"Oh, Charles," she half sobbed, hiding her face on his shoulder. "I do love you—more than I can tell you—more than I yet know myself. You must be good, and patient, and generous, and I shall only love you more and more."

"Look at me, Adrienne, my darling ; let me see in your dear eyes that you love me."

Her blue eyes were timidly raised to meet his own ; the brown eyes took possession of them, seemed to suck the young girl's being

into his own. He caught her passionately in his arms, rained kisses upon her brow, and eyes, and cheek, and then, with lips trembling as her own, sealed their betrothal in a long and fervid kiss. As their lips parted she murmured—"never again, until you can claim me as your wife," and he answered—"A sacramental kiss, my own, which consecrates our hearts and lives to each other for ever."

That the walk back to the castle was an intensely happy one, it does not tax one's faith to believe. That it occupied a considerable time, or that considerable time had been spent under the cedar tree, and so their prolonged absence rendered it necessary for the rest of the party to turn homewards without waiting, will not occasion much surprise.

When at last the missing couple made their appearance, Miss Reay and the pony-carriage were all that remained of the gay assemblage, and, with many apologies for the delay, and thanks to Miss Reay for her patient waiting, the three stowed themselves away in the low double-seated basket-carriage, Miss Reay comfortably extending herself in the seat

next the pony, leaving the vacant seat by the driver to Adrienne. A manœuvre, which whether accidental or intentional, was a great relief to two at least of the party, since it saved a *vis-à-vis* inspection of their countenances by the lady—or each other. The shades of evening were fast descending, and before Park Hall was reached, the October day had settled into night—crisp, clear and starlight.

CHAPTER VII.

THE days sped quickly on. Happy and contented in the acknowledgment he had won of Adrienne's love, Lord Charles had never shown to such advantage as now. First and foremost in every plan for the amusement of their guests, devising parties on the lake for boating or fishing, when no excursion offered for the day, he became the very soul of the party, and made rapid progress in the favour of the ladies.

Adrienne's manner was all he could desire. She was deeply and intensely happy, happy in herself and in him, and as opportunity served, frankly answered the silent language of hand and eye, which for the present, at all events, seemed to satisfy both.

Adrienne's was not a nature to do anything by halves, to shrink from any responsibility she undertook. She had suffered acutely from the uncertain moodiness of Lord Charles during the early part of her visit, suffered both in her affection and her pride. The deep peace which had followed the avowal of his love and her own, seemed to mellow her whole being, to add a richness and fulness to person, voice, and manner. Miss Reay's sharp eyes were among the first to notice the subtle change; but even the least observant could not fail to see that there was a change, and many were the compliments she received on her improved health and appearance, and the perfect condition of her splendid voice. By the aid of the light Lord Charles had thrown upon the subject, and possibly too by the aid of the light which had dawned upon her own heart, Adrienne noted day by day and almost hour by hour, unmistakable signs of devotion on the part of Mr. Harcourt, (or the Squire, as with her Devonshire habit she still continued to call him), towards Lady Florence, and of pleased acceptance on hers.

Why, she wondered, was there no open

avowal. In this case there could be no opposition. Mr. Harcourt was in every way a suitable match for the Marquis's daughter, and personally he was evidently a favourite both with father and sons. Lord Charles was right, if Florence, the frank, honest-hearted woman of the world, saw no harm in a private understanding with her lover, a gratification of some whim of her own or of both, surely there could be no shadow of harm if she and Lord Charles, loving each other truly and faithfully—to avoid trouble and annoyance to him, trouble and annoyance which would arise from purely conventional ideas, having no foundation in any real unfitness between them—were content to love and wait in the secrecy of their own hearts. A positive engagement she had declined; she had always heard clandestine engagements denounced, and so she would neither enter herself nor suffer him she loved to enter into one. And often as she turned this pretty sophism over in her mind, the remembrance of the betrothal kiss thrilled to her heart's core, and sent the blood tingling to her finger's ends.

Ah, Lady Florence, amuse yourself by casting a pebble into the lake, and watching the first circle it makes break into a second, third, and fourth. You have unwittingly cast a pebble into the sea of human life, whose circling you do not dream of. The last ripple of that unguarded fling may break on the shores of eternity!

"Adrienne, can I come in?" said Lady Florence one morning quite early, just as Adrienne was about to leave her room for breakfast. And almost without waiting for an answer she opened the door and entered.

"Adrienne, poor old Mr. Turner is dead—died in the night—another seizure; they have just sent to tell us of it; and hark! there is the passing bell."

Yes; on the clear autumn air came the solemn toll—a meaningless relic of the past faith of the land, still found lingering here and there in England, a rind, a husk, why has it not been cast away with the other "mummeries" of the grand old faith which we find it so difficult to replace, and to which the steps of so many are this day tending,

honestly, or dishonestly? When, at the sound of the passing bell, every head was uncovered, and every heart sent forth a prayer for the soul in its passage from the body, it was a christian rite, with a christian meaning. Can we be quite sure that this is the only rite we have so far rejected as to keep the stone with the kernel extracted?

The solemn sound boomed in at the open window. Adrienne's room was in the wing which looked towards the church, and as the girls listened in silence to it, a new joy danced in the eyes of Lady Florence, spite of the gravity of the moment.

"Now we shall have you for a neighbour, dear Adrienne. The poor old man! It is a happy release for him, and for us, and for the whole parish!"

"How do you know my father will consent to leave Coombe—the home of so many years, and where my dear mother lies buried?" said Adrienne, looking grave and thoughtful.

Lady Florence's eyes sparkled with sly merriment; she could not hide her pleasure

that what she had so desired was coming to pass. She seized Adrienne by the chin, and, looking affectionately into her face, said,

"You dear little innocent; do you suppose I have not taken care to learn that long before this?"

"How—when?" exclaimed Adrienne.

"Why, before we left Coombe, my father bid me sound Mr. Hope on the subject, and when I saw him hesitate and look as though he were about to refuse, I drew such a picture of your loneliness, and our great pleasure in your society, that the dear old man was quite disarmed—by the former argument, not the latter, I cannot flatter myself with believing that had anything to do with it. He only requested that nothing more should be said to you, as in case of anything happening to prevent the arrangement, the disappointment would, he was sure, be very great."

"My dear considerate father!" exclaimed Adrienne.

"And friend, if you please. Here have I been longing to tell you how nicely it was all arranged, and obliged in honour to hold my tongue. Again and again, when we have

been admiring the old grey church and the parsonage from the lake and the park, I have had positively to bite that unruly member to refrain from telling you it was to be your home. Never was there so troublesome a secret. I never will have another, I declare!"

"Indeed," said Adrienne archly. "Now if I had been asked, I should have said you liked a secret!"

"Why?" returned Florence, blushing to the roots of her hair, then, without waiting for an answer, which might have proved inconvenient, she caught Adrienne by the arm, and talking as fast as she could, hurried her down stairs to the breakfast-room.

"There is a secret," was Adrienne's mental conclusion; "so she and I are alike in that respect."

The death of the old clergyman was of course a subject of conversation during breakfast.

As Lord Charles greeted his sister and Adrienne, whom he met on the stairs, he found an opportunity of saying to the latter,

"Everything works well for us, dearest,"

and her glance it is to be supposed answered him satisfactorily, for he was in unusually good spirits at that meal and all the day after.

After breakfast, some of the party, tempted by the sunshine, strolled out into the garden from the billiard-room, and among them Lord Charles, his sister, and Adrienne. No sooner did the two former find themselves alone than Mr. Turner's happy release from his long suffering was discussed. He left neither wife nor child to regret him, and, like himself, everyone else was a gainer by the great change.

"We must write to Mr. Hope in a day or two," said Lord Charles, "for though I know he communicated the state of affairs to Harcourt while we were at Coombe, he did not give a formal notice of his resignation, and it is just as well these things should be done in order. I am sure my father will be very glad to have your father here as soon as possible, for the parish has not improved during Mr. Turner's long illness and under the inefficient care of his curate."

"Is a curate necessary here?" asked Adrienne.

"By no means, if the incumbent be up to his work, and have a wife or daughter to second him," replied Lord Charles. "I should say that your father and yourself will be quite equal to the demands upon you. I know you are very active at Coombe, and that is a larger parish than this—or rather I should say there are more souls in it. This has a scattered population, and your father will have to establish a pony-chaise for his own and your convenience."

"Oh, I do hope that no curate will be needed," returned Adrienne. "My father has always congratulated himself on being able to do the duty at Coombe single-handed. You know he is a student by nature, and it would very seriously put him out if he had a curate to direct or contend with."

"Adrienne," said Florence, "once you are installed here, we will get up a choir—there are some good voices among the farmers and their families round—and with your instruction we shall get on famously. The organ is good, as you know. We persuaded papa to give us a new one a few years ago. By-the-by, Charles, how stupid of us not to have

asked Adrienne to play on it before. Some of her favourite masses would sound grand upon it."

"We will make up for the omission when Miss Hope is settled among us."

"Let us see," said Lady Florence, "this is the end of October. Do you think, Adrienne, that your father will take possession at Christmas? Will it not be nice, Charles, to have this dear girl with us all through the dreary winter months!"

"You and Edward will be the greatest gainers," her brother replied, "for once Parliament meets, I can only be an occasional visitor. But I am glad for both your sakes; to say nothing of my own. But Flory," he continued, dropping with his sister a few paces behind, and speaking in a low voice while he fixed his eyes scrutinizingly upon her, "why you should so rejoice in getting Mr. and Miss Hope here puzzles me."

"I do not see why it should, Charles. She is a dear good girl and a charming companion. Edward enjoys her society very much, and it will lighten the winter both to him and to me to have her a good deal with us."

"But after this winter, sister mine, would you not be a greater gainer if she still remained at Coombe?"

Florence coloured, and answered hastily, "After this winter must take care of itself, my wise brother. It is good for us and good for Adrienne that she should come here. She is buried alive at Coombe, and I should have been miserable to think of her there all alone through the dreary winter months."

"Heaven knows I am heartily glad of the turn matters have taken," said her brother, with just so much feeling and earnestness in his tone as to make his sister look quickly into his face as she had done once before at Coombe, but though the brown eyes were resting softly on the figure of Adrienne a few paces in advance, the face was placid and imperturbable as usual.

The trio had by this time reached the library door, and as they were passing Lord Horton called them in.

He had not been at the breakfast table that morning—indeed he was rarely present at that meal—for though he endeavoured as much as possible to avoid invalid habits, and

always rose early when he could, quiet in the morning was essential to his well-being through the day.

At times a great sufferer, he was always obliged to manage his strength. Irritable nerves, the inevitable result of all spinal disease, can only be kept in tolerable subjection by absence of noise and over-fatigue. Half the bad tempers in the world are attributable to physical causes; and in this age of overtaxed minds and bodies we should judge each other more leniently than ever. But Lord Horton was singularly good, nay, even sweet tempered, so we must not be suspected of making an apology on this head for him.

His father had just left him, having come to consult him, among other things, about the appointment of Mr. Hope to the vacant living, and the young man now called the three most interested with himself to receive his congratulations.

Beyond the personal satisfaction this appointment afforded to all the young people concerned, it offered in itself considerable advantages to a man like Mr. Hope. Addicted,

as we have shown, to literary and scientific pursuits, he had often felt the serious inconvenience of residing so far from the great centre, the metropolis, and it was not to be doubted that the removal of this difficulty would in a great measure atone for any sacrifice of feeling he might make in relinquishing the home of so many years. Then, too, the advantages to Adrienne were so obvious, that had the change presented none for himself, he would still have felt bound to accept it.

Look at it which way they would, the young people could only find cause for congratulation, and Lord Horton was not the least demonstrative in his mode of expression.

To Lord Charles and Adrienne it came as a sort of sanctioning by fate of their attachment. The dismay with which he had first heard it proposed by his sister, was a thing of the past. Then he was striving to conquer a rising passion, counting the days and hours of endurance when the chance which had brought him and Adrienne so intimately together should be at an end, and the current

of their lives would thenceforth flow apart. Now he had not only surrendered to that passion, but had won the assurance that he was beloved, and though the future lay thick and impenetrable before him, he had been more than man had he refused to see and rejoice in the golden halo the presence of the loved one near and in his home, threw over its darkness.

The chances of the future he had scanned more deeply than ever the last few days. One—the one which promised the easiest solution of all difficulties, and which had been summed up in his exclamation under the cedar tree—“Oh, that I were the elder brother!”—his thoughts necessarily touched upon, though lightly.

To do him justice, he was not a man to wish even in the secrecy of his own thought, to rise upon the downfall of another, and that other his brother. Still, it was in the calculating nature of his mind to look boldly at all sides of the question, and therefore this also had been weighed. The other, and on that he could think calmly and fully, lay in his political progress and attainment of office, when

his party, as might be expected before long, should come into power. This was legitimate ground of speculation and hope, and it was to this he clung, feeling himself doubly a man in the responsibility he had incurred, and the attitude of antagonism to parental hopes and wishes, which he knew his love for Adrienne involved.

The present was bright, the future full of hope, and as the young man felt his natural ambition braced and strengthened by the new motive which influenced him, worldly as he was, his heart rejoiced within him, and in the few days which still remained before Adrienne's visit must draw to a close, he showed in so amiable and prepossessing a light, that he won golden opinions from all, and drew the heart of his beloved closer to him than ever.

Adrienne wanted now only to hear for herself that her father was satisfied with this change in his life, and it was not many days before she received a long and affectionate letter, which set her mind entirely at rest. It ended thus :—

“And now, my dear child, since we are so

soon to leave our home here, and the good people among whom we have passed so much of our lives, you indeed were born and have grown up among them, I think it would be as well that you should return without further delay than may suit the convenience of your kind friends. I feel the less compunction in this recall, because in two short months, with God's blessing, we shall take up our permanent abode with them. I cannot but rejoice, my child, in a change so greatly to your advantage in all respects. The thought of this reconciles me to what I might otherwise feel painful, but where you are so great a gainer, I cannot but feel grateful to our good friends, and to Him who ordereth all things for the best."

"Now, what shall we do about Adrienne and her long journey," asked Lady Florence, when the contents of the letter were made known to her after breakfast, appealing to her brother Charles, who stood talking to Lady Morton and Miss Reay in the window.

"Mr. Hope recalls her then?" he asked.

Adrienne gave him the letter to read, saying,

"It concerns all of you as much as myself, you will see at the end that my father wishes me to return as soon as possible; so, happy as I am here, I must obey. Indeed, if we are to flit here by Christmas, I have no time to lose."

"Can you not wait another fortnight," said Mr. Harcourt, "I shall be returning then, and I want to persuade Charles to come with me and try his luck in the field again. He will not get into such mischief a second time be sure."

"No, I must go at once—at least much sooner than that."

"Suppose we take charge of Miss Hope to London, and see her into the train for Exeter," said Lady Morton. "We are leaving the day after to-morrow, and can just as well go by the morning express as later. That will get us to Paddington in time for the noon train, and if Mr. Hope will meet his daughter at the other end, I think she will manage very comfortably."

"Oh, thank you," said Adrienne, "that will be just the thing. I will write and arrange with my father to day."

"You are in a great hurry to be off, Miss Adrienne," said Florence, as the group broke up and each went on his or her way.

"What must be must," replied Adrienne. "I know my father will be glad to have me as soon as possible, and though he is so dear and kind about breaking up his life at Coombe, it will try him sadly I am sure, and I should not be happy to be away from him. Besides, Florence, we can afford to say good-bye to our best and dearest even, when we know that a few short weeks will bring us together again."

Mr. Harcourt overtook them at these last words.

"Well said," Miss Hope, "but what for those who leave their best and dearest behind them for an indefinite period?" he asked, looking tenderly at Lady Florence.

"If they cannot abridge the period they must resign themselves as they best can," Florence answered, blushing. "But, to recur to my favourite expression, if I were a man, Mr. Harcourt—"

"You would not be such a tyrant as you are now," he interrupted.

"Now you shall not hear what I was going to say, for interrupting me in this rude way," she replied, laughing.

"Then, being a man," he said, as they mounted the broad oak stair-case—

"You will show us women what loyalty, and faith, and patience are," she broke in hurriedly.

Mr. Harcourt for all answer dropped a step or two behind, and taking Florence's hand in his own, pressed a hurried and fervent kiss upon it. She drew it hastily away, but not so hastily that he did not feel the lingering pressure of the slim fingers on his broad palm, whereby he was greatly encouraged and consoled.

There is a special providence over lovers as well as over drunken men—and there need be too—for love is more intoxicating than wine, and its results more enduring. Keen-eyed as Adrienne was, this little passage of hands escaped her observation, though the manner, both of the Squire and her friend, more than confirmed her previous suspicion.

There was a secret understanding between them, and her own secret sat lighter on her conscience for the thought.

BOOK THIRD.

“ Love’s a virtue for heroes ! as white as the snow on high
hills,
And immortal as every great soul is
That struggles, endures, and fulfils.”

LORD WALTER’S WIFE.

BOOK THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

THE new year had fairly set in before Mr. Hope took possession of his fresh home and charge. Much as Adrienne's friends at Park Hall had hoped and wished that the rector and his daughter should enter their family circle during the genial season of Christmas, it was found impossible of accomplishment without such violence to his feelings, as neither his daughter nor themselves would on any account have consented to.

Mr. Hope found the parting from his old home, and the associations of years more try-

ing than he had expected, and but for the thought of Adrienne, even at the eleventh hour, he would have declined the change, and petitioned to be allowed to remain where he was. The uprooting of a quiet, monotonous life is a process of pain but little guessed by those whom habit or circumstance has knocked about from one place to another, until the difficulty is to remain stationary at all. The life which does not spread far—which has little surface expansion—is apt to strike out deep roots. Injure the tap root of shrub or tree and it will forthwith take the matter into its own keeping, and die. Wrest suddenly or rudely a human being from a long life of simple duties and circumscribed interests, from the tranquil flow of days, weeks, months, and years, and you will wound and injure a thousand delicate tendrils, even if you do not aim a deadly blow at the very root of his existence.

Mr. Hope's was one of these narrow, placid existences, and he felt bitterly the severance of old ties, the parting with young men and women whom he had known as children; with the sick and aged whom he had first

seen as hale, hearty men and women, and, more than all, with the home where his own children had grown up about him, and, which, hallowed by the living presence of a loving and faithful wife for so many years, was now sacred as the closing scene of her earthly pilgrimage.

Only for Adrienne's sake—their last and best beloved child—could he meet the pain of this uprooting, and find strength to bid adieu to the scene of the labour and the love of the brightest portion of his existence. Only for Adrienne's sake! Could he have known the peril and danger—the sorrow and suffering which awaited that beloved child in the new home for which he was surrendering the blessing, and peace, and security of the old, Christian minister as he was, could he have refrained from cursing the hand from which the blow was to come, or from praying in anguish of spirit that he and his child might lie by the side of wife and mother in the quiet corner of that quiet churchyard ere it fell,

“ Safe and sheltered from sorrow.”

Who among us, who has reached middle

age, but thanks God in his heart of hearts that only by degrees is the veil lifted from the terror and torture, the bitterness and anguish, of life, that "one by one" our griefs meet us, which could we see as a host looming in the distance, the bravest among us would fall prostrate before the vision, powerless to strike a blow in our own or other's defence.

Peggy's grief and bewilderment were at once pathetic and comic. A native of Devonshire, born in Exeter, but having passed the greater portion of her life in Coombe, first in the service of the previous incumbent, and ever since in Mr. Hope's family, she was even more firmly rooted than her master. And as the time for the flitting approached, in the rare intervals between household duties and multifarious packings of her own and her master's goods, Peggy would retire to a favourite corner between the fire-place and the dresser, and, throwing her apron over her head, cry herself to sleep in a helpless state of bewilderment and despair.

But Peggy was a woman of sense, and when Adrienne, seeing her disconsolate condition, fairly attacked her upon the subject,

though she made a brave fight for her own peculiar sufferings in the matter, she was obliged to confess that the arguments her young mistress brought to bear were unanswerable.

"Now, you dear old Peggy," said Adrienne, in a coaxing tone, which was irresistible to the old servant, "What does it matter to you whether you live in this particular parsonage or in any other, so long as you have papa and me to look after? Why you know you never stir out of the house or grounds from year's end to year's end, except to church on Sunday—and, as for neighbours and gossips—why you will have a deal more company at Park Hall than here. Besides, Peggy dear, you will be happy in my increased happiness; and oh, it is such a dear, happy life where we are going, that I can hardly believe it all real."

"Well, Miss Adrienne, dear, it is very true that I love no one on earth as I love master and you; still I can't help feeling down-hearted and lonesome-like at the thoughts of leaving the old place behind, and the dear old mistress there in the church-

yard all alone by herself," and at these words, Peggy thrust the corner of her apron into her eye and fairly bohoed.

"Dear Peggy, mamma is not there," said Adrienne soothingly, "she is with us and about us, though we cannot see her—I often feel her quite close to me."

"Lor, my dear child," said Peggy in amazement, "do you mean for to tell me that you feel your blessed mother about you."

"Yes, Peggy, I do; her spirit is at times about me, I am sure; and I believe if I try to live and act uprightly that God will permit her to help and protect me in my hour of need."

"Now if them ain't the most comforting words I have ever heard concerning death," returned Peggy, wiping her eyes, and pondering, as she examined the corner of her apron. "But is it according to the Bible, my darling; would master say the same thing?"

"He would say as I do, Peggy, I am sure—that mamma is not there in the churchyard—that is her body only, her worn-out body,

which she told me herself,¹ only for my sake, she should be glad to lay aside for ever."

"Poor lady—poor lady," said Peggy, shaking her head slowly; "she went out like the wick of a candle, when the tallow's all melted; but I have it on my mind that she suffered more nor she said, and so was glad to be at rest. She was a good lady—a good and faithful wife, mother, and mistress. Her soul has gone to glory."

Peggy, though a member of the Church of England, as in duty bound, considering the orthodox relation in which she had always stood, was fond in her private reading of Methodist tracts, as "more heartsome and homely," she said, and her phraseology savoured occasionally of this mental food; especially when the depths of her faithful nature were stirred.

Adrienne's words took strong hold of her imagination. They put vividly before her the fact of the double nature of man—the material and the spiritual. It was a new idea to her, that the spirit of her mistress should be freed from the body before the day

of resurrection ; and some days after this conversation, she broke out suddenly to her young mistress—

“ Miss Adrienne, dear, how do you know that your mother’s spirit does not lie there with her body, till the day of judgment ? ”

“ Did not our Lord say to the thief on the cross, ‘ verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise ? ’ and the body of the thief was still on the cross when night came.”

“ Sure then, he did,” returned Peggy, “ and it’s a blessed thought to have that the spirit of those we love is not in the dark and lonesome grave—but with God, and able to see and hear us.”

“ It is indeed, Peggy dear, and I believe if we all thought and felt this, it would help us more than anything else to lead good and true lives.”

“ But God sees and hears us,” said Peggy reverently.

“ He does, Peggy dear, and that thought ought to weigh with us most of all—it is a solemn and an awful thought—but somehow, it seems to me easier to realise the spiritual

presence of those we have known and loved on earth—who have been one with us in love and sympathy—than it is to realise the presence of the Great Spirit himself. I hope I am teaching you nothing wrong, Peggy dear, but I know the thought of my mother's spiritual presence is a help and a blessing to me, and while I keep it fresh and strong as it is now, I do not think I could do anything very wrong—not at least if I knew it to be wrong."

"God preserve you from all wrong of your own or others, my darling," said Peggy fervently, and from that time the subject was not renewed between them, but Peggy drew comfort from the thought, and often conned it over in the silence of her own mind.

Mr. Hope had expressed so strong a wish to spend Christmas and the New Year among his old parishioners that it was impossible to gainsay him. The Squire came home two or three weeks after Adrienne, and brought word that Lord Charles had promised him a week before Christmas.

Lord Charles had asked Adrienne if she would write to him occasionally, but she had said,

"No—I shall hear of you through Florence and the Squire—you will send me a book or a paper now and then—and Florence will tell you of me."

And when he had expressed disappointment, she answered,

"Is it not enough that we love each other—and know it? Let us do nothing clandestinely, which we can avoid. I am content to bear the burden of a secret for your sake—assured in my own conscience that no reason exists which should make the sacrifice of our love a duty; but do not let us burden ourselves with unnecessary deception. Two short months, and I shall be where you can at all times see and hear of me."

The young man felt she was right—that she was acting in this refusal, as he would have his future wife act—and so he bowed to her decision. When he found that there was no hope of her presence at Park Hall until the new year had turned, he promised Mr. Harcourt a week's visit before Christmas and so timed it as to bring the Squire back with him to pass Christmas and New Year at Park Hall.

The young men rode over to Coombe together, and the squire begged so hard that Mr. Hope and his daughter would spend an afternoon and dine at the Hall—a farewell dinner—that Mr. Hope could not possibly refuse.

“Let it be the day before we go to town,” said the Squire, “the fellows I have here with me now will have left by then; and we four can enjoy a cosy time together.”

And a cosy time they had. The squire and Mr. Hope had business to transact during the afternoon, and Lord Charles undertook to amuse Adrienne.

That they found this arrangement to their taste, and that the two hours’ saunter through the fine old grounds seemed among the very shortest they had ever known, will be perfectly intelligible to all who love or have loved, and not difficult to imagine by those whose golden hours are yet to come. The past, the present, and the future, are tenses of the verb TO LOVE, which we all conjugate *con amore* at different periods of our lives.

CHAPTER II.

By the end of January the parsonage, thoroughly renewed inside and out, under Lady Florence's personal direction, who took pleasure in selecting papers and graining and making the house look its best, was taken possession of by the new rector and his daughter, whose position with the family at the Hall would alone have ensured them a cordial reception in the parish, had there not been other and good reasons for rejoicing in the advent of a capable man and a lady. The clergyman's wife or daughter is almost as important a consideration to country parishioners as the clergyman himself.

The death of Mrs. Turner some years before her husband was stricken with paralysis, had



been a great deprivation to the poor, in whose cottages she was a constant if somewhat stern visitor—and if Mr. Turner failed to fill her place, we may be sure that the raw young curates he was obliged to call in to his aid were even more unsatisfactory.

Adrienne's bright young face and kindly genial nature were in themselves passports to immediate favor—but even these fail to satisfy the needs of the poor, unless to them is joined a knowledge of their simple wants and how to meet them.

Adrienne's first visit to a sick bed assured the sick woman, and, through her, all the poor of the immediate neighbourhood, that Miss Hope was one of the right sort—knew what a poor sick body's needs were, and how to minister to them.

Adrienne, happy in herself and her surroundings, entered upon the duties of her position with a zest she had never before known. With a tender care for her father's personal comfort and well-being, she had with her own hands arranged everything in his study as nearly as possible the same as in the study at Coombe. And if his room there had been well adapted

to the privacy and quiet he delighted in, this was none the less so.

The park rectory was a good old fashioned grey house, substantially built, warm in winter, cool in summer; qualities not to be found in the thin shells of which modern houses are for the most part formed, and which afford anything but adequate protection from the raw cold of our nine months, more or less, winter. England might possess the finest climate in the world to judge from its semi-transparent villas, and its country houses built upon the damp soil itself—which nine months out of the twelve is saturated with falling or fallen rain. But the rectory was built in the good old times—a substantial stone house—comfortable to look at, and comfortable to live in. The best rooms faced across a wide sweep of the park to the east wing of the hall, the wing in which the great dining hall was situated, and which, flanked on either side by noble cedars and elms, was a picturesque object. The rector's study looked towards the church and the lake beyond, which, with the white sails of the boats swaying in the breeze, gave life to the

landscape. A private path led from the church and rectory across the park and through the garden to the hall—the path by which the family and its dependants attended the church, and which was now likely to be more used than ever by the young mistresses of the two establishments.

Lady Florence found Adrienne Hope even a greater acquisition than she had expected. Winter was always a suffering time with her elder brother, and this winter seemed to be trying him more than usual. By the time February, that dearest, coldest month of all the year, had arrived, he was thoroughly invalided, and no longer attempted to do more than leave his bedroom at mid-day for the warm, comfortable library. Here most days, either in the afternoon or evening, Adrienne would join the brother and sister, passing a couple of hours or so in reading aloud or talking, or, quite as often, in playing and singing.

Florence had under-rated her own musical ability at Coombe, as Adrienne soon found. Though she had not Adrienne's decided talent, she possessed a pretty clear soprano voice and

was well taught, both instrumentally and vocally—much better taught than Adrienne—who profited not a little by her friend's superior knowledge. Their voices harmonised well together, and many hours of weariness and pain were thus beguiled to the suffering young man—hours in which neither reading nor conversation were possible—and which his sister had for long years thus soothed.

Lord Horton and his sister usually passed the winter at Park Hall, the Marquis and Lord Charles coming and going between it and London as suited their convenience. The visits of the latter were usually from the Saturday to the Monday—and if, from the time of Adrienne's settlement among them, these visits became more frequent than before, there was nothing in this fact to attract the attention of others—while to the young people themselves, it seemed only natural that they should seek each other's society as much as possible, and if Adrienne learnt to look to this meeting as the brightest spot in her present bright existence, it was in all the innocent faith and enjoyment of a love which her conscience

sanctioned, and which she looked some day to see openly avowed.

Lady Florence wished to establish it as a rule, that at the close of the Sunday afternoon service—(there were only two services in the Park church), Mr. Hope and his daughter should repair to the Hall to dine and spend the evening. It was a healthy break in the week, she insisted, for Mr. Hope, and Adrienne she must have for the sacred music, which was in request now by the Marquis as well as his children.

The Rector's usual dinner hour was at two o'clock, and Adrienne would, of course, have conformed to the habits and tastes of her father, even had not these habits especially suited herself. An early riser, even in this mid-winter, it was no unusual thing for Adrienne to make her appearance by some sick body's bed, with a bright morning greeting and some creature comfort, long before her own breakfast with her father at nine o'clock. Adrienne and Peggy brought with them their Devonshire habit of ministering to the bodies as well as the souls of the Rector's flock, and both were fast be-

coming prime favorites in the cottages around, while the fame of their good deeds spread far and wide.

The Rector's increased income would have allowed of an addition to the family in the shape of another maid and boy. But Peggy, used to reign alone, so steadfastly resisted the introduction of another woman servant, that the point had to be given up; though, as the Rector contemplated a pony and chaise, as Lord Charles had suggested, she yielded so far as to allow a boy to be engaged at once to assist her in the house for the present, and to look after the pony and carriage hereafter.

After breakfast the real duties of the day began. Mr. Hope found the school badly organised and badly attended. He and Adrienne set themselves to work at once to reform this, and here her school experience at Coombe stood her in good stead. Two hours every morning—from ten to twelve—she gave personal attendance and superintendence, and it no sooner became known in the village that the good young lady, the Rector's daughter, was "to school" herself every morning, than the number of children began

to increase and soon bid fair to be what it ought.

From twelve to two she either visited the poor, or occupied herself at home in their behalf, and the afternoon or evening, according as she was at home or at the Hall, was devoted to reading, study, or work of her own or for her father. No minute of the day was unoccupied; and, truth to say, she did not always find it easy to devote a couple of hours to Lady Florence and her brother. But this, too, she considered as a duty—the brightening up of the worn languid face as she made her appearance, the evident enjoyment of book, or chat, or song—Florence's assurance that her presence made their winter life quite a different thing to what it had been before—all taught her to look upon what she could do for the dear friends who were so good to herself, as a sacred duty. Moreover, were they not *his* brother and sister whose lives she was thus helping to brighten?

Every morning, at ten o'clock, wet or fine, Lady Florence mounted her horse and was off for a couple of hours' ride. Sometimes afterwards, she would join Adrienne in her

visits to the poor—this, on days when her brother was later than usual, and did not make his appearance until the two o'clock lunch. Adrienne found Lady Florence always ready to assist where she wanted help, and Lady Florence delighted in an almoner for her father and herself, whose personal knowledge of the poor ensured help being given to the right person, and at the right moment.

The church choir was a pet plan, to be carried out as spring came on. The short winter days were more than occupied already, and, until Adrienne was well known, it was not likely that the young men and women of the neighbourhood, the raw material out of which she was to manufacture her choir, would cordially second the plan.

Lord Charles amused himself sometimes by quizzing the patriarchal simplicity of their lives.

"It is quite refreshing, I declare, to escape from that wicked Babel yonder, where every man's hand is against his brother, to the charming simplicity and unanimity of your pastoral existence here," he said one day,

laughing at Florence and Adrienne. "Who would believe that, within two hours of London—"

"Now, be exact, brother mine, an hour and a half of London, if you please. You will never be the accomplished statician you aim at if you allow yourself irregularities in familiar conversation."

"Well then, who would think, oh! most precise of sisters, that within an hour and a half of London, an M.P., a man of the world, who spends, say six days of the week, in the heat and din and turmoil of politics and fashionable life—where party spirit runs high, and men and women are alike bent on the achievement of their respective desires—who would think that such a man disappears on the Sabbath into the bosom of a family, whose calm career during that time, has been marked chiefly by the hours of rising and going to bed; of eating and drinking; and whose thoughts only the simplest and most innocent pursuits have occupied? Why, I declare, it is like stepping into another world, and I find myself asking, which is the substance and which the shadow?"

"And a very lucky man you may consider yourself, to have such an oasis in the midst of that wicked, seductive London life, where, but for the influences of home and family ties, more of you young men would make wreck even than now," returned his sister. "Of all things I am thankful that fate has put it in my way to know and appreciate the blessings of a country life."

"Fate orders everything for the best, if we would only think so," said her brother, laughing. "Doubtless, Flory, you are in training for the life-long career of a Lady Bountiful in some fair English county, and Miss Hope here, with her practical knowledge of things, is helping in that training."

Lord Charles' speech savoured of *malice prepense*. Indeed, he had of late indulged somewhat freely in inuendoes, and only that Florence's faith in the Squire was unbounded, she would have been tempted to believe that their secret was in other keeping than their own.

Moreover, it was an old trick of this brother's to *plaider le faux pour savoir le vrai*, so even this broadside failed to throw her off

her guard, and turning to Adrienne, she said,

"I believe Charles envies us our peaceful lives here, and it is nothing but envy and malice which point his gibes. I do not know if you are the attraction, Adrienne, but this brother of mine was never so constant in his visits home at this season of the year before. So, at all events, he finds us and our pastoral existence worth the cultivating."

A random shot this, but it told as her brother's well-aimed one had failed to do. Adrienne blushed painfully, and even Lord Charles' imperturbable face bore a momentary look of consciousness.

But it was a random shot, and so Florence took no heed whether it struck home or not, and the blush and the conscious look were alike unheeded.

CHAPTER III.

THUS the winter rapidly passed away with the friends at Park Hall and the Rectory. It is astonishing how swift the flight of time is where life passes in a round of simple duties and where there are no prominent events to mark its flow.

"How dull you must be," Londoners are apt to say to country friends and acquaintances; but we believe nowhere is dulness so little felt as in country home circles, while we are quite sure that dulness of the darkest, dreariest kind is an inmate of cities, whose visits even some of the more fortunately situated cannot escape. In the country there are no false excitements, no day to day and

hour to hour strain upon the nervous system, none of that almost imperceptible yet exhausting animal wear and tear, which does its silent work, sapping and undermining the strongest constitutions of those who dwell habitually in cities; and should there come hours of gloom and depression, Nature is at hand, with her thousand restorative influences of earth and air and sky; and dull indeed must be the eye and ear, cold the heart, and blank the mind, which refuses to see and hear the wondrous and ever changing beauty and refreshment so lavishly offered to all who seek. From the bird upon the tree to the storm-driven clouds, or the clear blue ether of a summer sky—from the lowliest weed which hides in hedge or bank to the glory and splendour of tropical plants and flowers—from the lowest to the highest note of beauty in the scale of creation, there are responsive tones within ourselves—if we will only listen and heed—and who will deny that in all this, and in yet more a thousand times than pen can describe, the dweller in the country has the advantage?

Among other letters in the post-bag one

April morning was a letter from Miss Reay to Lady Florence. Short and to the purpose, it ran thus—

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“‘Sick in heart and sick in head,’ as glorious old Herrick has it, I want quiet and refreshment. My thoughts turn longingly, these early spring days, to budding trees, and singing birds, and all the ‘dear delights’ of the country—nowhere more enjoyable than in your beautiful home, with its stately trees and fair pastures. Is your brother well enough to bear the infliction of my long promised visit, and if so, shall I come to you next Thursday? My holiday time is limited, but I feel as though I should die or go mad if I did not get the refreshment of the country.

“Ever yours,

“HELEN REAY.”

To which Florence replied in a longer epistle, ending thus—

“Come, and go mad with delight at the opening spring, or let it take the fever out of

your brain and send you back to your labours whole and sane. We have been looking for you all the month, and shall very heartily rejoice in your presence."

Lord Horton had been on the mend for some weeks past. The March winds once gone, he rapidly revived, and once or twice already he had lain basking in the sun just outside the library window; recruiting his lost electricity, he said, arguing that if the sun has a revivifying effect upon the magnet, it cannot fail also to affect the delicate machinery of the human body.

Miss Reay's conversation upon animal magnetism had set Adrienne and Lady Florence reading Reichenbach, and Lord Horton had, of course, come in for his share of the subject. They had proposed making some experiments themselves, and always intended to devote an evening to the purpose, but somehow the light and warmth of the cozy library had proved too seductive to be exchanged for hours in a dark room with uncertain results. It would be curious and highly interesting, no doubt, to see blue and crimson flames exhaling from the tips of their

own and each other's fingers; but to do this, they must exchange the certain comfort of the flames the fire gave, and so the experiment was postponed *sine die*.

Lord Horton and Adrienne received the news of Miss Reay's visit with pleased looks and expressions.

"I like her very much," he said; "she has always plenty of conversation; has seen a great deal of the world, both at home and abroad, and yet does not bore one to death with her experiences."

"I also like her exceedingly," said Adrienne, warmly, "and I feel sorry for her too. She has known a great deal of trouble and sorrow, I am sure, and it seems so hard that she should be obliged to work as she does, with broken health."

"She would tell you," replied Lady Florence, "that work is her salvation. I had a long talk with her on this subject when she was here in the autumn with Lady Morton. I was bantering her upon the physical unfitness of women for work—for sustained work of any kind, and mischievously held her up as an example. She looked vexed and

pained, and said, warmly, 'Next to my own personal griefs and troubles, there is nothing which troubles me so much as that people should impute my physical sufferings to the results of over-work. I owe them to years of over-strain upon a nervous system never strong, of physical fatigue from years of travel and exposure, and social dissipations altogether beyond my strength, and, these last, repulsive to my habits and tastes. No amount of study and sustained work could have injured my health and exhausted my strength as those fatal years of my life have done, and if I should break down altogether eventually—as I sometimes feel that I shall—the crowning drop of bitterness will be that to woman's physical inability to work will be attributed what has resulted from quite other causes. I came to this work with shattered health, with a life barely wrested by skill and science from destruction, with a vital flaw in my physical powers. My work has done much to heal and restore me, and if, in the end, I am compelled to give it up, it will not be the work which has over-taxed me, but that I came to it, weakened and in-

jured from long years of mental suffering and distress.'"

"I remember now a conversation I had with her about women and women's work," said Lord Horton. "She did not to me allude to herself; but she said it was not fair to lay to women's want of physical power what had in reality nothing to do with it. That nearly all the educated women who found themselves obliged to work for their living, were brought to this point by some family or personal crisis, had gone through previous sorrow and suffering, which had undermined their health, even where they had been spared actual privations. That, unaccustomed to work of any kind, the necessity for it came upon them in a shattered condition, and having none of the social and recognised aids which attend the working man in all classes of society to support and sustain them, their position was altogether one of exceptional trial and difficulty. She spoke with the authority of experience, for the work she is engaged in places her in the midst of these unfortunate, struggling women, and I confess she threw a new light on the subject to me."

"She threw new light on a great many things to me," said Adrienne, "and I am very glad she is coming again so soon."

"And so am I," said Florence; "we shall have her more to ourselves than in the autumn, when the house was full, and she is just one of those persons who show to most advantage in intimate home life. She is silent and reserved in general society."

"I sympathize with her there," said Lord Horton. "I feel shut up in a room full of people—ill at ease—uncomfortable."

"Miss Reay would tell you," said Adrienne, "that that is because you are sensitive to other people's mesmerism, as she is herself. You must get her to talk to you on this subject—it is curious."

"I dare say she will help us about this choir," said Lady Florence. "I heard her once describing how a friend of hers had got together a most excellent one, somewhere in London, which had become so noted for its good music that people came far and near to hear it. Now we do not aspire to anything so grand, but still she may give us some useful hints."

And so when Miss Reay arrived she found a cordial welcome, and dropped at once into the ease of the home life her friends enjoyed so thoroughly.

For the first day or two she was greedy of the fresh air, declared her thirst for it insatiable, and, while Lady Florence went for her morning ride as usual—for Miss Reay would hear of no change in the daily plans for her—book in hand, she betook herself either to the shrubbery where rooks and rabbits were her only companions, or to the lake, where, taking a light boat, she would row and paddle about in the fitful April sunshine the whole morning through, drinking in healing and refreshment, and enjoying to her heart's core the peaceful beauty of the scene. Miss Reay was one of those human beings who take delight in simple pleasures, and to whom nature, in all her moods, was a well-beloved and sympathetic friend. She loved horses and dogs, and birds, and animals of all kinds, and used sometimes to say that the dumb brutes were the only objects of affection which never hurt or wound; that if she could have her way she would pass the rest of her

life among them. But as Miss Reay seldom failed to respond to human claims upon her aid and sympathy, we may conclude that, however bitter the experiences through which she had passed, there was still a fund of kindly affection and sympathy for her fellow beings left, and that the instincts of those who needed help were not at fault when they were led to seek it at her hands.

"Of all things I dread taking a gloomy and morbid view of life, because my own experiences have not been fortunate," she said one evening, in conversation with Lord Horton, whose physical afflictions, borne for the most part bravely and patiently, weighed at times heavily upon his spirits, and induced moods of depression.

Miss Reay had a keen vision and an almost intuitive perception of what was passing in the minds of those she cared enough about to seek to comprehend; and to this perception, a natural gift, was added the cultivated one of ministering to the "mind diseased" without any conscious reference to the disease itself. She liked Lord Horton, and appreciated keenly the misfortunes of his posi-

tion, and the gentle equanimity with which he usually endured them. But beneath this equanimity she saw there was a depth of sadness which circumstances might any moment convert into bitterness and despair.

They had been talking upon life in general, and, as usually happens in such discussions, the conversation had taken a personal turn. It was in answer to a remark of Lord Horton's, which involuntarily disclosed this substratum of despondency, that Miss Reay said—

“Of all things, I dread taking a gloomy and morbid view of life because my own experiences have not been fortunate.”

“Yet it is difficult not to see things through our own peculiar mental atmosphere,” he answered, “and that must be affected by our thoughts and feelings, and these again by personal facts and experiences. I do not see how we can avoid looking upon life according to the position we hold in it, and our daily and hourly experiences of it.”

“In the young life of the individual, as in the young life of a nation—witness the United States of America for example—the Ego, the I, what I think and feel, and do, is always

a prominent feature," returned Miss Reay, "but as the individual and the nation ripen, the Ego becomes more and more merged in the general good and welfare. Neither the young nation nor the young man—and by man here I mean mankind—is in harmony with it or himself, and its or his surroundings. Facts with both acquire an undue importance. The young man thinks that everything concerning him, everything he does, is of vastly more importance to others than it really is; ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the action over which he has pondered with reference to the effect it will produce upon others, his friends and acquaintances, in the end produces no effect at all, is only important to himself. By-and-bye, as his intelligence grows, and the angles of self-consciousness and conceit get rubbed down by actual contact with the practical life of the world, what he is and does falls into its legitimate place. He finds himself, instead of the observed of all observers, the one interesting spectacle in Creation—as hobble-de-hoy Yankeedom to this day thinks itself—but a link in the great chain, where his personal idiosyncracies and experiences, how-

ever important and interesting to himself, are only of value to his fellow beings, as they fit or unfit him to play his part among them. The individual success or defeat, the individual happiness or sorrow, bears but an infinitesimal proportion, is but a drop in the ocean, to the general good and prosperity ; and as we grow from youth to manhood, and from manhood to riper age, not what we have to suffer and endure, but how we suffer and endure, becomes the question of importance ; and in proportion as we rightly estimate our own value in this and other respects, we shall strive against personal selfishness, and looking with faithful and intelligent eyes upon the life around us, endeavour to reconcile our own life with that, and to find healing for our wounds in the happiness and well-being of others."

"But you admit the reality of the suffering to the individual himself?"

"Surely ; even our idlest fancies and conceits are realities to ourselves. As the terror of the coward, who sees danger in everything, is real, and makes his life a perpetual torment, so our "vaulting ambition," our over weening

self-esteem, which makes us place a false value on all we are and do, our foolish trust in ourselves and others, our vain hopes and expectations, all are realities to ourselves, for and through which we suffer keenly and in earnest. But it is the result we must look to, not the process. And if we allow our sorrows and sufferings to embitter our natures, to give us jaundiced views of our own lives and the lives of others, we are guilty of a mental and moral suicide, to which that of a hand lifted against our physical and material life is as nothing."

"Yet you have a lofty idea of the value and sacredness of life," said the young man.

"Of the value and sacredness of the mental and spiritual life, yes; of the physical, no. By which I mean," she continued, as though fearing to be misunderstood, "that I never had that strong love of life, of bare physical life, which is so universally felt and acknowledged, which makes some people, and good people too, say 'if it be to live in a dungeon, on bread and water only, still give me life—this dear human life,' and the older I grow the less I value life, for life's sake—the more I wonder

that any should. Indeed, I cannot help feeling that the view generally taken of life and death is altogether a mistaken one, and that an immense step in public morality would be made if people were taught that death is, as it were, but a bridge to another existence, and that the only true life, even in this world, is the mental and spiritual life, to which there is no end, no death—the material frame, this body of ours, with all its needs and requirements, but the complicated machinery through which the mind and spirit act, and upon which alone death itself has power—coming, an angel in disguise, to remove the clogs of mortality, and free the spirit for a higher and purer existence than it can ever attain to here, bound and fettered by the flesh.”

“Miss Reay reminds me of what my mother used to say,” observed Adrienne, who had been sitting by, listening.

“I was just going to ask Miss Reay,” said Lord Horton, “if these are spiritualistic views of life and death, but your mother, I suspect, Miss Hope, had not been thrown in the way of this new belief.”

“What a blessed thing it is,” replied Miss

Reay, "that no creed, no form of belief, strive as it may, can shut out the development of new ideas. Like winged seeds, they penetrate everywhere. Here is a case in point—A Devonshire rector's wife, and a cosmopolitan-anythingarian, as some people call me, saying the same thing, or nearly the same, when we must have arrived at our conclusions in a totally different way."

"There is an invisible catholic church," said Lord Horton, "which embraces members of all denominations and creeds. I suspect you are a member of that church, if of no other, Miss Reay."

"I have lived so much among people of all denominations," she returned, "have found among the best of all, such unanimity in the objects striven for—charity, patience, self-discipline, and neighbourly love—that, I confess, I attach little importance to the creed professed. The human soul is nobler and better than any creed that was ever fashioned, and the only true temple is the temple made without hands—of which we each and all hold the key—and where he who gives reverent reception to the Great Spirit, striving to con-

form his life to His teachings, is his own high priest. Sadly heterodox opinions I am afraid, but, as the saying is, one man's orthodoxy is another man's heterodoxy. It matters little what road we take, only that we do take one, and spite of pit-falls, and fogs, and bewilderments; spite of roaring tempests and raging winds, of quicksands and bogs and morasses, hold on our way undaunted. If we stumble and fall, rising again; making head against all opposition from within and without, until we attain shelter and security, a place to pause and rest in, to gird up our loins in thankfulness, and start anew, ever onwards and upwards. As one of our sweetest and most spiritual poets says:—

“Complain not that the way is long—what road is weary
that leads there?
But let the Angel take thy hand, and lead thee up the
misty stair,
And then, with beating heart, await the opening of the
Golden Gate”

END OF VOL. I.

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